The Iger Comics Kingdom

by Jay Edward Disbrow

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Foreword

With the introduction of Superman in issue one of *Action Comics* in 1938, the so-called "Golden Age" of comic books was born. The "Man of Steel" proved to be such a success that he was immediately followed by a host of costumed heroes, endowed with extraordinary physical prowess, and dedicated to the eradication of crime and injustice.

A handful of businessmen saw the potential of this kind of comic book entertainment and were quick to exploit it for the profits it contained. It may seem incredible in this day of high inflation, that ten cent comic books could yield dividends in sufficient quantities to enable publishers to become wealthy upon their proceeds, but such indeed was the case.

Less than four years after the advent of Superman, America was deeply immersed in World War II, and it was during this period (1942 to 1945) that sales of comic books rose to astronomical heights. They sold in the tens of millions, and there was scarcely an elementary or high school class that did not contain them by the hundreds; clandestinely brought in by eager readers, who found comic book stories far more interesting than their studies.

In 1943 the market was glutted with more than 500 individual titles that were released as either bi-weekly, monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly. With each title selling approximately 400,000 copies, it takes little imagination to visualize the tremendous lucrative value these publications represented.

Few people realized that prior to the Golden Age of comic books, another comics age existed. Aficionados refer to this epoch as the "Pristine" age. This period ran from 1933 to 1938, and was characterized by both bold experimentation, and blatant mediocrity. Much

of the material this era produced was crude, both in terms of art and story structure. But some of the published efforts put forth revealed genuine talent, serving as a spring board for the great era to follow.

Most of those early comics consisted exclusively of reprints of newspaper strips from earlier years. Since this type of magazine sold well, it appeared the course of comic magazines has been permanently established as a re-print vehicle . However, there were a few men of vision in that early period, who recognized the value of publishing original material. Such a man was S.M. "Jerry" Iger.

Jerry had plunged into the medium with an abandon that astonished the less venturesome entrepreneurs already in the field. While others were content to merely get their feet wet, Iger went for the entire show. But if his methods at times appeared a bit brash, there was sound judgement behind all that he did. From the humble beginnings of his Manhattan studios in 1935, Jerry Iger layed the foundation of a comics empire that sprang to glittering fruition during the Golden Age of comic books. Many of the heroes he created have found nitches in the comics Hall of Fame that exists in the American psyche.

His most popular creation was Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, that vivacious blonde beauty of the African wilds. Numerous other comic book protagonists have also emerged from his fertile imagination. Among them were Kaanga, the Blue Beetle, the Flame, Phantom Lady, Black Condor, Wambi, the Ray, Tiger Girl plus Wonder Boy and a host of others. An astonishing number of famous comic characters owe their existance to this man of remarkable imaginative powers.

In addition, nearly a third of the famous artists of the Golden Age received their initial "break" at the Iger Studios. A glittering galaxy of comic talent can be traced back to the Iger Studios. A mere sampling of names include such stalwarts as: Will Eisner, Bob Kane, Jack Kirby, Matt Baker, Jack Kamen, John Celardo, Joe Kubert, Martin Landau (actor), Micky Spillane (novelist), Mort Meskin, Lou Fine, Reed Crandal and Bob Webb. This writer also was fortunate enough to have gained entrance to the comic field by way of the Iger Shop.

For more than two decades, the Iger Studio produced a plethora of comic material that entertained the nation. In addition to comic books, Iger also owned his own newspaper syndicate, Universal Phoenix, which provided comic strips to hundreds of newspapers throughout the U.S. and abroad.

The Iger Studios, although modest when compared to the giants like Walt Disney Studios, was nevertheless, a corporation of considerable magnitude. When one consideres the sheer volume of comic book pages produced there, the imagination is staggered. When further considered, all the prototypes and their spin-offs that resulted from that effort, the astonishment is heightened.

It is a virtual certainty that any American beyond the age of forty has at least a passing acquaintance with the material from the Iger Shop. For those younger, this book will hopefully open new vistas into a magnificent age that exists only in fond memory, in the comic fans of yesteryear.

This is the story of that era, and the man who did more to shape it than any other individual. This is the story of the life and times of Jerry Iger; a man who founded a kingdom, the memory of which lasts to this day; *The Iger Comics Kingdom.*

Born Samuel Maxwell Iger

The year 1903 was significant in the annals of human history. Henry Ford was perfecting the design of his famous *Model-T* automobile. Kaiser Wilhelm was building his military machine that would launch World War I. Albert Einstein was preparing the incipient formulas that would eventuate in his "Theory of Relativity." Woodrow Wilson prepared his entrance into politics from his ivory tower at Princeton University. And . . . Jerry Iger was born.

His given name was Samuel Maxwell Iger. Once of four children born to an immigrant couple from Austria in a tenement house on the side of Manhattan, New York.

His father, Jacob Iger was a native of the beautiful and romantic city of Vienna, and had served in the army of Emperor Franz Joseph in the late 1880's. It is possible that he might have become firmly entrenched in his military career, had he not met the blue eyed blonde beauty, Rosa Mirschorn.

Rosa accepted his marriage proposal, and from the moment of their wedding, she instilled within the young soldier a desire to come to America. In those days, many Europeans still clung to the illusion that American streets were paved with gold. Many of them received a rude awakening upon arriving on these shores.

In the case of Jacob Iger and his bride the allurement was not economic aggrandizement, but the "American Spirit" that motivated them. They wanted to become a part of the grand movement that had led numerous men and women from the New England shore line to the Barbary coast of California. From far away Vienna they could feel the irrestible appeal of this virile young nation.

The couple began preparations for their momentous undertaking, saving all the money

they could put aside. It proved to be a more formidable task than they could have imagined. Relatives who had learned of their desire came forward with the financial assistance needed and by the time Jacob's enlistment had expired, they were ready for their great adventure.

After an uneventful crossing of the Atlantic, they arrived at Ellis Island in New York Harbor, as had tens of thousands who preceeded them. After their immigration processing had been completed they moved into a modest apartment in Manhattan.

Two children were born to them in the early years of their settlement, a girl whom they named Augusta, and a boy, Joseph. Both children were exemplary in conduct and behavior from the time they were toddlers. However, with the birth of their third child, Samuel, the pattern shifted.

It seemed obvious to Jacob and Rosa that their son, Samuel was destined for greater things than a simple mundane existance. The talent he possessed was obvious, early on his strong affinity towards art was evidenced.

The boy thrived in the atmosphere of the big city. The bustling tempo of the great metropolis weaved a spell of enchantment about him. In those tender years he wasn't at all conscious of it's seamy side, even though there were ample indications of it in many areas of the city. On those rare occasions when his parents took him uptown, Samuel was enthralled by the enormous buildings that rose in majestic splendor above him.

He had hardly begun to enjoy the mystique of the big city, when his parents whisked him away to the open plains of the great far west. Jacob, who had plied the trade of a merchant since his arrival in America was presented with an opportunity to join a business venture with his cousin, a merchant in Oklahoma. It was admittedly a risky venture, but it also held out the hope of providing a better standard of living, than was possible in New York. Jacob was not the kind of man to take reckless chances with the security of his family, yet he felt he couldn't pass up this kind of opportunity — it might never come again. In the fall of 1908, he placed his wife, children and all worldly possessions on a train and headed west.

In those days train travel was slow, rickety, dirty and uncomfortable. For the Iger children it was a source of endless delight. They would sit for hours watching the expanding and contracting, ever changing landscape from the coach window. Their eyes would shine with delight whenever they passed a herd of cattle, or glimpsed a string of horses. Such creatures had been totally alien to their city enviornment.

The Iger family's destination was a small hamlet called Idabel, in the northern sector of Oklahoma. The surrounding area was mostly arid flat land with a few hills and valleys in the vicinity, and a mountain range in the distance. There in that rugged frontier town, Jacob joined forces with his cousin and together they began to serve the needs of the neighboring communities.

This section of the state was known as "Indian Country." The Choctaw inhabited the hills and valleys of the region. Samuel and his siblings attended school with the Choctaw children. In spare moments, the young Indians taught the Iger children the Choctaw language. Samuel, who had great interest in such matters was initiated into may aspects of the Tribal Lore. It was impossible for him to join the "council" sessions, where the legends of heroic Choctaw warriors were retold, as ceremonies were held at night. Yet the stories were passed on to him by the Indian boys whose confidence he'd won.

The small school-house the Iger children attended was finished with the basic building material of the Old West; adobe. It was rugged and servicable, and stood out in sharp contrast to

the crude Indian dwellings that stood in close proximity. The principal, professor L.M. Gray, Iger recalls as the stereo type of every frontier principal. He was a strict disiplinarian, who tolerated no nonsense in his school. In those days corporal punishment was an acceptable method of dealing with unruly children, and Mr. Gray applied it with a generous hand.

His elementary school teacher recognized his talents and encouraged him to develop them.

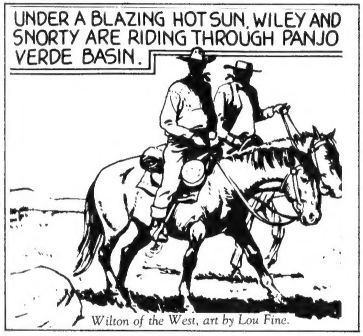
"Some day you may become another Russell, or Remington." she said.

"But I like to draw funny cartoons." the boy replied.

"If that is your desire, the only way to suceed at it, is to perfect your skills." she said. "That requires practice and study."

Samuel took her advice to heart and began to draw in earnest. In the years to come he would reap the reward of those early efforts.

The vast barrenness of the Oklahoma territory was etched deeply into Jerry Iger's subconcious mind. Even into his seventies, a mere glance at a Swinnerton painting would conjur sweet memories of his boyhood days on



Wilton of the West, art by Lou Fine.

Wilton of the West, art by Lou Fine.

the open frontier. The life style and the philosophy of the Old West was so different from the Eastern culture that they may as well have been a million miles apart, but the days of quiet solitude at Idabel were soon to end.

In 1916, Jacob Iger received an offer from another cousin in New York, to join him in a partnership in real estate in Brooklyn. Had conditions in Oklahoma measured up to his original expectations, Jacob wouldn't have given the offer a second thought. As expectations go, he had not grown rich on the frontier, as he hoped, and New York was unquestionably a better place to turn a profit. So again he packed his family, now consisting of four children (with the birth of a daughter, Belle) and goods aboard a train and headed back to New York.

The real estate business did not prove to be the bonanza Jacob had hoped for, yet it provided the necessities of life in a civilized enviornment. Young Samuel attempted to pick up the threads of life where he had left them eight years before, but he wasn't the same. Life on the Oklahoma plains had changed him and he'd never quite be person he had been in the past.

Chapter Two

Learning A Trade

World War I came and went, and as the nation settled down to peaceful pursuits, the youthful Samuel Iger felt more strongly than ever the desire to get on with life and a challenging career. In the winter of 1922, he learned of a job opening at the Max Fleisher animation studios in Manhattan. He applied for the job, was hired and put to work operating the rotoscope machine. This was a unique device enabling the craftsman to convert live action motion pictures into animated cartoons. The principle was quite simple. An actor (in this case, Fleisher himself) would go through various motions before the movie camera. The developed film would then be projected on a small screen in a booth, one frame at a time. An artist would trace each frame on velum paper. The tracings would then, be filmed one frame at a time. The end result was an animated cartoon with the "feel" of live action.

Everyone is familiar with those marvelous color animated cartoons from the Walt Disney and Leon Schlesinger Studios. Few people realize that Max Fleischer preceded Disney by at least seven years, and Schlesinger by twelve.

Film making as a whole, and animated cartoons in particular were at best a crude effort in the 20's. After approximately a year at the Fleischer Studios, Jerry Iger felt that there was no more that he could contribute, short of becoming president of the company.

Time to move on, but to where? In the spring of 1923, the opportunity he longed for opened like a magic door before him. He applied for a job at the New York American, the flagship newspaper of the Hearst eastern empire. In those days the paper was headquartered in a rambling old building at 238 William Street in lower Manhattan.

The nineteen year old cartoonist was hired

Winsor McCay, Editorial Cartoonist for the New York Journal American Newspaper as he appeared in 1929.

by the famed editor-writer, Gene Fowler, author of the bestseller *Goodnight Sweet Prince,* and numerous other novels. Fowler was a man of extraordinary talents, plus being gifted with the ability to recognize talent in others. He saw in the youth from the western plains the rudimentary skills and organizational ability that would ripen one day into an outstanding career. Iger was eager to accept the challenge. He eventually worked on everything from spot cartoons to advertising layouts.

While with the Hearst enterprise he produced many pieces of original advertising art, but his real love was panel cartoons and comic strips. In those early days at *The American,* he worked with some of the top professional cartoonists of the day. Men such as Windsor McCay, Bugs Bear and Joe McGurk.

Winsor McCay, artist of the editorial cartoons for *The American,* had a career in comics that went all the way back before the turn of the century. His greatest contribution to the medium was the magnificent fantasy comic page *Little Nemo in Slumberland.* A marvelous illustrator and writer, he also performed "feats of magic" on stage at a number of New York City theaters. Week after week newspaper readers were treated to a series of whimsical "dream adventures" in full color, Little Nemo would be placed in extrordinary situations of intrigue, peril, or just nonsensical confrontations. At the high point of interest on each Sunday page, Nemo would awaken from his dream and utter a charming homily of explanation.

In October of 1929, New York experienced a trauma that spread like the shock waves of an earthquake that eventually engulfed the entire nation. The infamous Wall Street "Crash" struck with a suddeness that caught the country by surprise and left misery and ruin in it's wake.

Oddly enough, certain elements of the entertainment business were not adversely affected. Although Vaudeville and the legitimate theater were almost wiped out, the motion picture industry thrived as never before. Twenty cents would buy a movie ticket, even the poorest of individuals could scrape together the price of admission. During this period, even Hollywood's worst production could turn a profit. Tinsel Town was booming, it's inhabitants becoming incredibly rich, while the rest of the nation sank deeper into poverty.

The newspaper business also thrived during this period. With the *Daily News* selling for two cents a copy, and *The American* and *The Times* going for three cents, many people could afford the price to keep up with world events. Consequently, Jerry Iger's job at *The New York American* wasn't in jeopardy.

In 1933, Jerry felt that ten years with the Hearst Empire was enough. Along with millions of other working people, he also, had been forced to take a salary cut. Of course he recognized that it had been a necessary condition to continued employment, but at the age of thirty he desired a more challenging career. Jerry was not afraid to take chances, and knew the risks involved in a sudden change of jobs. Winsor McCay proved to be an encouragement to him. "You may be buffetted like a clump of paper in the wind," he said, "but I know you will land on your feet, and some day I will be proud to have known you."

At that time Iger did not know that the project he was contemplating had already been an accomplished fact. Comic books had been in production for at least three years. But their print runs had been small and hadn't attracted wide notice. The kind of comic books he had in mind were far different from what was in existance. Jerry was an innovator of the first rank, and what he would contribute to the medium would be more spectacular than anything that had preceeded it.

Chapter Three

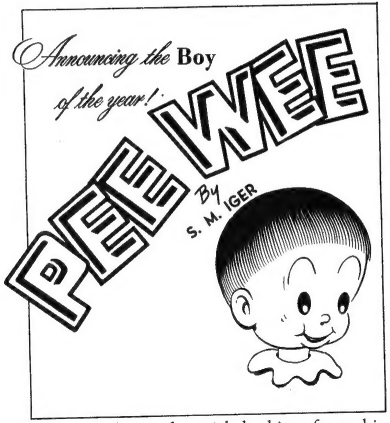
The Great American Dream Factory

In 1929, Phil Nowland and Dick Calkins created the first science fiction strip, *Buck Rogers*, for the John F. Dill Syndicate. That same year, Hal Foster began working on the comic strip adaptation of Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan*, for the United Features Syndicate.

In 1933 Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy* exploded upon the comics scene and acquired an instant following. In 1934, Milton Caniff (former assistant to Noel Sickles of the *Scorchy Smith* strip) launched his famous *Terry and the Pirates* for *The New York News*, *Chicago Tribune* combo. The Hearst owned King Features Syndicate published Alex Raymond's magnificent *Flash Gordon — Jungle Jim* features, also in 1934. A year later *Brick Bradford* and *Mandrake the Magician* premiered at King.

Adventure comics were surging toward their tidal crest of popularity. The time had come for comics to step into their own exclusive milieu. According to Overstreet's *Comic Book Price Guide* (in a perenial article by Thomas Inge) the first four color comic book released for news stand distribution, was a monthly publication called *The Funnies* , published by George Delacort in 1929. From all information available, it appears that this magazine had a very small print run and limited distribution. Then in 1933, Max Gaines (father of William Gaines of E.C. fame) created the magazine called *Funnies on Parade*, using all reprint material from earlier newspaper comics. Encouraged by his success with this first effort, Gaines soon released *Famous Funnies*, a comic book destined for a very long run. Later that year, Max published two more titles, *A Carnival of Comics* and *A Century of Comics*.

Comic books were now a young but proven institution, with a very promising future. The handful of publishers in that early period were



able to obtain financial backing from big industry, which paid the cost of publication and distributed them free, as part of the promotional programs for their manufactured goods. But all of those early comic books consisted almost exclusivly of reprint comics that had run years earlier in newspapers. That situation ended in 1935.

In February of that year Major Malcom Wheeler Nicholson (an artillery officer in World War I) published a comic book called *New Fun Comics*. This magazine, which was the precursor of the famous D.C. line of comics, contained all original material. Nicholson hired a staff with Lloyd Jacquet, comics editor; William Cook, managing editor and later added John Mahon as business manager.

New Fun Comics did not create a sensation in publishing circles, but it did garner sufficent sales from its viability to such an extent that Bill Cook and John Mahon decided to team up and produce a comic book of their own. they left Nicholson early in 1936 and established a publishing enterprise which they called The Comics Magazine Company, which later became The Centaur Publishing Company.

Meanwhile, an enterprising young business man, Harry A. Chesler, decided that the newly formed comic publishers would require the art and stories to fill the pages of their growing magazine out put. He concluded that by forming a pool of artists and writers, he could direct the mass production of comic books.

Chesler approached Major Nicholson with his idea and received a positive response. The two men worked out a deal whereby Chesler would provide a specified number of completed comic book stories and covers for an agreed upon fee. In December of 1936, Chesler opened a loft studio on Manhattan's lower Fifth Avenue. Word soon got around that such an institution existed, and young artists with stars swimming in

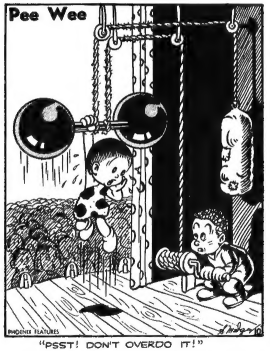
"GEE, ALBERT, YER KID BROTHER TORE OUT TH' LAST PAGE!"

their eyes began pouring into the Chesler Studios. Harry hired as many as he could use, and production went into high gear. Some of those early cartoonists who started with Harry, went on to achieve big names in the comic book field. A sampling of that talent includes such luminaries as Paul Gustavson, Gil Fox, Fred Schwab and Charles Biro, who later became producer, director and star of the Lev Gleason Publications.

Harry Chesler provided comic book material not only for Nicholson, but also for Nicholson's chief competitors, the Cook-Mahon enterprises. Several years later, Harry branched out and began producing work for Fawcett's Captain Marvel and *Master Comics*, as well as for the original *Blue Bolt* and *Target Comics*. At one point he released two comic books of his own, and wasn't overjoyed with the results.

It's amazing how a single concept can take root in the minds of several men at the same time

"HOW MANY BOX TOPS DID YOU HAVE TO SEND IN?"



"PSST! DON'T OVERDO IT!"

at divergent distances from each other.

The concept of comic books occured to a tiny group of men, in no way connected to each other, at about the same time; the early 1930's. In January of 1936, Jerry Iger entered the comic scene. He answered a newspaper ad from a business man named John Henle. Henle was looking for a combination editor-production man to run a new magazine. He insisted that all applicants must be "college men." Iger applied anyway, and by the time his interview with Henle was over, all demands for advanced education were dropped. Iger was hired and given full responsibility for running the magazine. Jerry even chose the title, which was *WOW! What a Magazine*. Much of the content of this publication was created and executed by Jerry himself. Realizing that he would need assistance in an effort of this size, he ran an ad in *The New York Times*, soliciting the sevices of cartoonists.

The result?

The response was overwhelming, but most of the applicants were amateurs, with very little commercial skills. However, there was among the group, a young man in his early twenties who was obviously cut from a different cloth. Yet he approached Jerry with a timidity typical of those whose hopes are high and fear of rejection is apparent.

"Mr. Iger, my name is William Eisner," he said, "and I would like to apply for the job as a cartoonist."

"Have you had any experience, kid?" asked Iger.

"Yes sir . . . some. I would like to show you my samples."

Young Will Eisner opened his portfolio and carefully removed its contents. He placed each comic page sample on Jerry's desk. Jerry examined each piece with a practical eye. He must have seen in those samples something representative of the greatness that would one day characterize Will Eisner's work. The anatomical structure, the grace of line and mass, the supple contours of muscle and bone, pulsing rhythm of figures in action or repose; all of these elements were present in rudimentary form.

To pass by such talent would be unthinkable, so Jerry hired Will Eisner and put him to work on several features appearing in *WOW!* magazine. Will was in no way a disapointment to Jerry's expectations. Before long be developed a work pattern that enabled him to produce a considerable amount of comic material without sacrificing quality.

A few weeks later, another young artist made his way to the Iger Studios. This applicant was little more than eighteen. Despite his tender years, his work reflected the grace and flamboyancy that would one day make him a household comic book name: Bob Kane.

At this early stage, Bob Kane thought of the comics only as a vehicle for humor. Although he

Will Eisner's early art work, "The Hawk."

greatly admired the work of Alex Raymond and Milt Caniff, he evidently didn't see himself cast in the role of an adventure comic artist. Fresh from New York's famous Art Students league, Kane came to the Iger Studios, expecting (if hired) to do humorous strips. Jerry agreed to this approach and assigned Bob, two comedy strips, *Hiram Hick*, the story of a bumbling country bumpkin, and a gag feature, *Jest Laffs* and *Life in the Roar*.

In February of 1936, *WOW! What a Magazine* was released with mixed results. Initial sales were encouraging enough to warrant a continuaton of the entures. Meanwhile, Jerry Iger approached Max Gaines' editor, Harold Moore, about the possibility of creating original comic material for *Famous Funnies*, which up til then had comprised only reprint material.

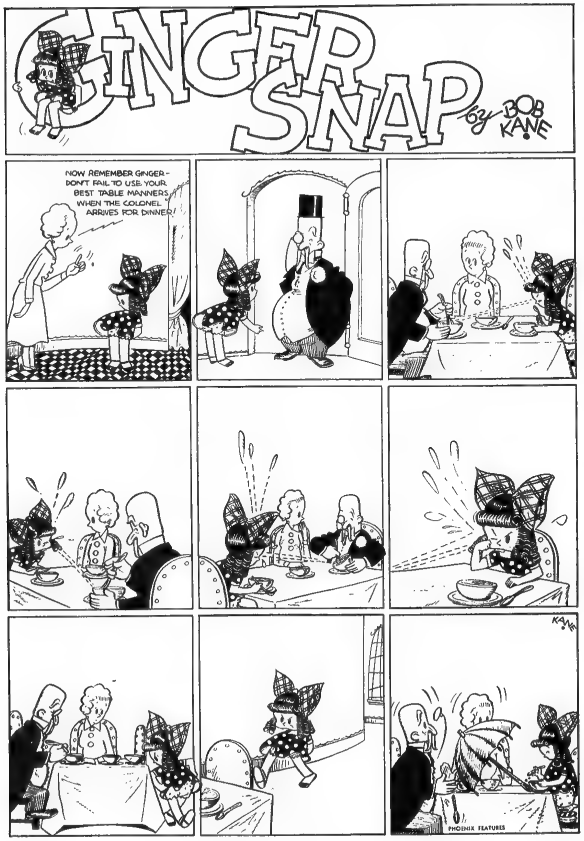
Moore was enthusiastic about the idea, especially when he saw the comic strip Jerry had created. So it came about that Jerry Iger independently created several new strips for publication in *Famous Funnies*. Their titles; *Pee Wee*, *Bobby*, and *Happy Daze*.

When considering the condition of the country as a whole, we must conclude that by most measures, 1936 was a fairly good year. While the nation was still in the grip of an economic depression, there were signs of recovery in various places. Employment had risen, prices has stabilized, and credit was again available. Relief programs were helping the poor and private philanthropy was doing it's part. The average income for a family of four was thirty dollars a week.

Toward the end of 1936 the Iger Studios were thriving, Will Eisner had proven to be a powerhouse of creativity. As he turned out more and more art his skills improved noticably, and his inking technique began to take on the lush quality for which he later became renowned. Will wrote his own story plots and was soon

Early work from Bob Kane, from Jumbo Comics #1.

"Bobby" created, illustrated and written by Jerry Iger.



Bob Kane's early work from "Jumbo Comics."

developing scripts that involved a combination of humor and pathos, which later became the Eisner trade mark of excellence.

Bob Kane was making continous progress, Iger suggested that he try his hand at a new funny animal strip. "Right now Mickey Mouse and Felix the Cat are going great," he said. "Why not a comic strip about a dog? As far as I know, Pluto is the only one in existance, but he's just a minor character in the Mickey Mouse strip. I want you to come up with a dog that will be the star of his own comic strip."

After some thought and planning, Bob created the new feature *Peter Pupp*, a whimsical canine with a built in faculty for problem solving.

In the spring of 1937, distressing news was coming from the Henle distributors. Sales of *WOW!* had dropped sharply. John Henle began to lose his nerve. He felt that to hold out would be economically disasterous. So he decided to cut his investments and close down his publishing office. Summer of 1937, found him severing all ties with the Iger Studios and walking out of comic history.

With his biggest market closed to him, Jerry was faced with the unpleasant task of cutting overhead. By this time he had a staff of four workers producing comics on a full time basis, three of them were layed off. Young Bob Kane and two other artists whose names are lost to posterity were reluctantly terminated.

Meanwhile, Jerry had been investigating the possibility of producing comic strips for distribution abroad. He reasoned that England and the European Continent were more than ready for American comic strips. He located a number of international distributors who were eager to handle his features, Iger realized that he'd have to incorporate if his interests were to be protected. Will Eisner was a valuable business asset, and to expensive to keep on as an employee, so Jerry made him a full partner.

Thus was formed the Universal Phoenix Syndicate, an enterprise destined for great achievement in the field of illustrated narrative. When all the legal details of the corporation were settled, Jerry's first act was to re-hire Bob Kane, to help produce all the new features that would emerge from this new undertaking. Meanwhile, new American markets were investigated and proved to be fruitful.

In the latter part of 1937, the Iger Studios produced a series of tabloid size comics, printed on heavy tinted newsprint. Each issue ran sixteen pages on stock tinted either blue, green or pink. Those pale colors added an unusual quality to the finished product. Among those early release appeared comic adaptations of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame, The Hawks of the Sea* and several other. These comic were sold to newspapers overseas through the Editor's Press Service of New York City.

As 1937 drew to a close, a new artist arrived seeking work at Iger's shop. He was Bernard Baily, who later went on to fame as the creator of D.C.'s ghostly avenger *The Specter*. Baily's talents were still "raw", but Jerry Iger saw his potential and hired him.

During the years he maintained his New York studio, it was typical of Iger to recognize the innate talent of young artists, even when it was in it's most elementary form. It was almost as if he possessed an inner sense that saw the future. There are many artists today, who are grateful that Jerry Iger was endowed with this faculty.

In December of 1937, Jerry Iger met with Thurman T. Scott, a publisher of considerable clout. Scott was Editor in Chief of the Fiction House Publishing Company, which published pulp magazines. The term "pulp" was derived from paper stock on which the magazines were printed. The pages were cheaply produced, and as a result the texture was very rough. Quite frequently, one could see actual spliters of wood

from the ground up pulp that comprised the pages. The covers were printed on a high grade slick paper. Artists who did paintings for the cover art usually rendered magnificent full color oil paintings, designed to capture the eye and excite the imagination of the prospective buyer.

Iger brought to Scott's attention the great potential that lay in comic book production. The publisher was interested, yet cautious. After all, the country was still in a depression and risk capitol wasn't easy to come by. To invest money in an uncertain project could be extremely dangerous.

"Comic books are the coming thing," Iger told him, "Right now they're still in their infancy, and doing well. As I see it, comic magazines have an unlimited future."

"If I could be positive of that, I'd give you the go ahead right now," replied Scott.

Redrawn by Al Dellinges.

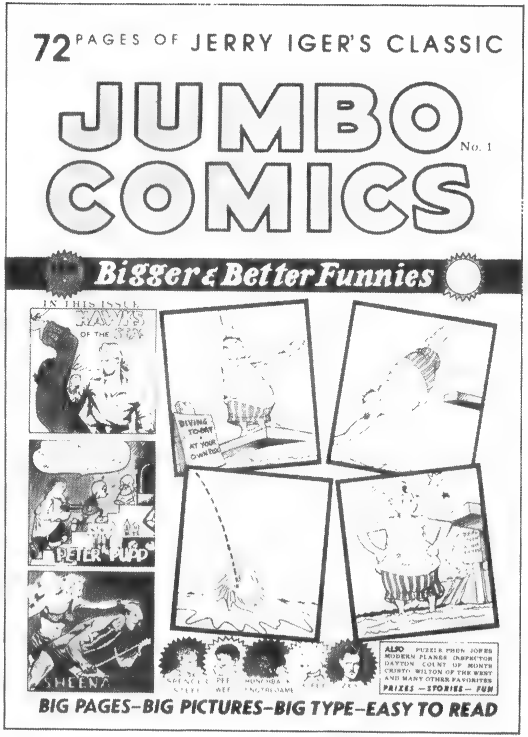
Redrawn by Al Dellinges.

"There's no reason to hesitate," the cartoonist advised, "This is your chance to get in on a whole new enterprise. You already have the set up for it. I can supply you with the scripts and the art work. You can start with some of the comics, I've already sold overseas. I can even supply you with the printing plates."

Thurman Scott was not an easy man to convince, but Jerry was able to sell him on the idea of making an initial effort and Scott authorized Jerry to proceed with one comic book title as a trial.

"If that one proves successful," he said, "we'll consider others."

The ball was now in Jerry's court. He was given carte blanche of the type of magazine he'd produce. "Just come up with something that will sell." was Scott's final admonition. Jerry gave his best thought to the project, he decided this must be bigger and better than anything before. He



The Classic First Issue Reprint of "Jumbo Comics" published by BLACKTHORNE PUBLISHING, INC.

Actress Cynthia Evans, the inspiration for Iger's "Sheena" character, as she appeared in 1936.

"Sheena, Queen of the Jungle", from Sheena #1.

searched for a title that would reflect the qualities he had in mind. At last he found it in a name coined by the great showman P.T. Barnum. In the early 1900's, Barnum exhibited the largest elephant ever seen by the western world, he called it "Jumbo." The name seemed to possess magic, for it captivated the imagination of American and European circus attendees. The name was ideal for Iger's new project, because this magazine would be bigger than any other comic book ever published. Thus was born, *Jumbo Comics*. Iger and his staff gathered the original plates (used in the foreign newspaper venture) and found more than enough material for the initial sixty-four page issue. This magazine would also be printed on pastel colored paper. It was obvious from the printing source available that the finished product would be as good or better than the originals printed overseas.

Jerry Iger had earlier sought an idea for a special comic hero. Numerous suggestions were considered and discarded. Many route sources from classical literature, were consulted and eliminated. Finally, he settled upon an Edgar Rice Burroughs legend. He would create a Tarzan-like hero. Instead of a jungle man, he would create a jungle-woman. She would be the golden-haired, white goddess of the African jungle. She must be a creature of wonderous beauty, yet possess the sharp intellect and physical attributes enabling her to survive in the wilds of Africa.

*Sheena first appeared in the comic sold overseas through the Editor's Press Service

Chapter Four

Comics Catch On

June of 1938 premiered *Action Comics*, a D.C. Publishing (Nicholson Ent. off-shoot) release. That first issue introduced the hero from Krypton, known to millions as Superman.

What few people realize is the fact that *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle*, made her debut one year earlier in various European publications. The first issue of *Jumbo* was a tabloid size magazine, with numerous special features, some of which lasted for many years. It's size, layout and color tints made for a most attractive publication.

Form the onset, Sheena captivated the minds of comic readers. The concept of a white woman raised in the wilds of equatorial Africa, being forced to pit her wits and survival instincts against savage beasts, wild primitive natives, and the forces of nature; these elements of the story exercised the fascination of comic book readers.

But it would be a mistake to assume that Sheena was a female Amazon brute. Despite the lack of civilized ammenities in native surroundings, she was a lovely and completly feminine woman. She always appeared well groomed in her leopard skin covering and her long golden hair was always freshly combed and appeared hygenically clean. Her survival skills were based on her innate intelligence plus her extra ordinary agility. Only once before, had one like her been seen, in the 1930 Paramount picture, *Trader Horn*, the jungle girl. The jungle girl was a wild primitive creature who didn't speak, whereas Sheena spoke perfect English and all the native dialects of central Africa. In addition, she fought with wild animals, outwitted evil men, and escaped innumerable traps that were sprung upon her. In spite of these seeming incongruities, Sheena was fully accepted by

BLACKTHORNE PUBLISHING'S reprint classic of "Sheena."

comic fans who cheerfully suspended their powers of disbelief in her favor.

The Jungle Queen slowly built her following. Among the readers who purchased Jumbo Comics on a regular basis, was a corps of dedicated Sheena fans. With the release of Jumbo #8, the decision had been made to cut the magazine down to standard comic book size (about 7½"×10" was standard at that time) and to print it in full color, to make it more competitive with other commercial comics.

Jerry Iger and partner collaborated on the Sheena scripts and the early stories were drawn by Mort Meskin, the artist who created the Sheena "look" of the late 1920's. Sheena's look was to undergo a number of subtle changes through the years, but the essential nature of Sheena remained the same through innumerable stories, and two decades of publication.

Meanwhile, Thurman Scott was delighted with financial returns from Jumbo Comics, and

"Wambi"

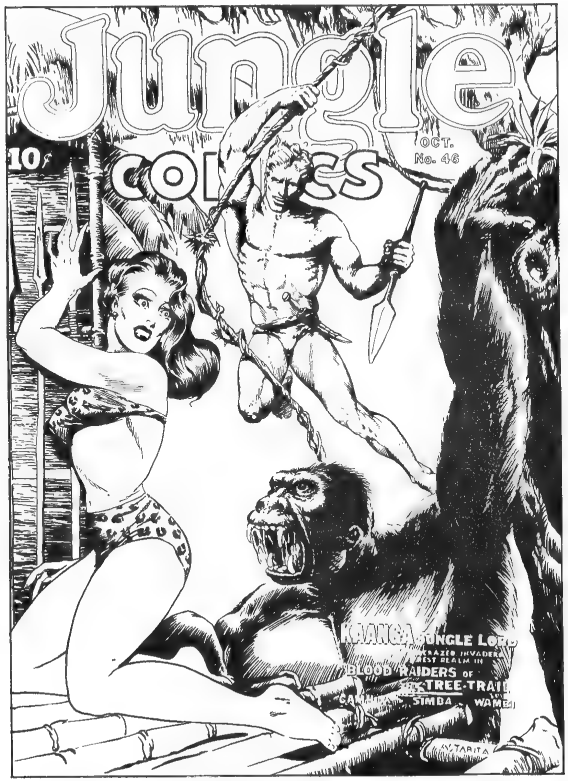
decided to plunge deeper into the waters of comic book production. He eventually released a throng of comic book titles under the Fiction House seal. The art and stories for those publications was handed to Fiction House, doing business as Universal Phoenix Features.

The next Fiction House title released was JUNGLE COMICS, which was published early in 1939. This magazine featured the adventures of a young "Tarzanian" hero with blonde hair. His name was KAANGA (pronounced Ka-anga.) Acutally, Kaanga was a comic book adaptation of a jungle hero previously owned by Fiction House. In the Fiction House pulp magazine, JUNGLE STORIES, a blonde muscular jungle man, named KHIGOR, had been appearing since the mid 1930's.

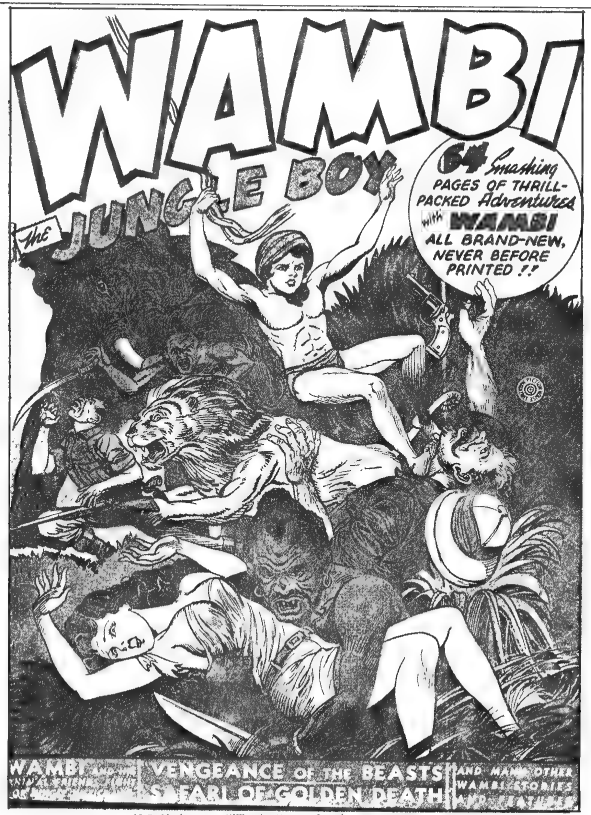
In rapid order he other famous Fiction House comic book titles began to appear, They were PLANET, FIGHT, WINGS, and RANGERS COMICS. In later years two more titles were added, INDIANS and GHOSTS COMICS. In addition, a number of feature comic magazines were added from time to time, such as SHEENA, all KAANGA, all WAMBI and FIREHAIR. Such feature publications were devoted exclusively to the characters whose names appeared in the magazines titles.

Of the famous Fiction House heroes, at least half were created by Jerry Iger. Iger had the good sense to copyright those features in his own name. His employee's creations were his property for life, he merely leased them for publication. This was a wise business practice that Jerry was to follow throughout his career, and it was this more than any other factor that enabled him to amass his fortune.

With the work load from Fiction House



This John Martin cover was featured on the October of 1943 issue of "Jungle Comics."



H.C. Kiefer cover, "Wambi's" artist from his inception in 1939

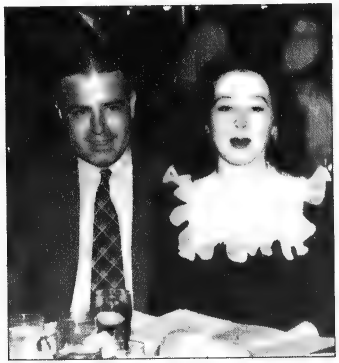
piling up, Jerry Iger was in need of additional artists. He again advertised in the New York Times, and the results proved to be even greater than he had anticipated. This time, artists of advanced skills showed up at his studio. Among the cartoonists he hired in 1938 and 1939 are names that have long since become famous in the field of comic book production. They were Jack Kirby, John CeLardo, Reed Krandall, Lou Fine, George Tuska, Alex Blum, Charles Nicholas, and Adolphe Barreaux (the Maxfield Parrish devotee who later founded Trojan Publications).

Early in 1939 a New York City business named Everett Arnold, glanced at a sales report on comic books currently in existence, and came to the conclusion that comic books represented a very good investment. A few inquiries among business associates, produced for Arnold the name and address of Jerry Iger. Arnold contacted Jerry and laid his proposition before him. He wanted to establish a new line of comic books that would be "different" from anything being published at the moment.

"I'm interested only in quality material for my magazines," he said. "In fact, that's going to be the name of my publishing company, QUALITY COMICS."

Jerry Iger studied the problem posed by "Busy" Arnold's demands, and developed a line of comic book material that was not only "different" for the times in which they were created, but they remained different, and superbly crafted throughout the span of their existence. This, of course, was the beginning of the QUALITY COMICS Publishing Company, an organization that became pure magic in the realm of comics innovation. Through the years, Arnold established a solid reputation with such titles as HIT, CRACK, FEATURE, NATIONAL, and MILITARY Comics.

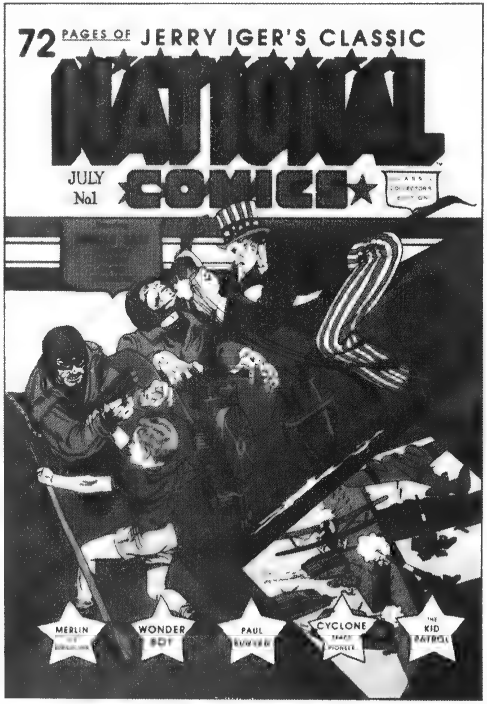
Among the pantheon of famous heroes created for Quality were such illustrious characters as Doll Man, Uncle Sam, Espionage Agent, Black Hawk, and Will Eisner's famous Spirit.



Everett "Busy" Arnold, publisher of "Quality Comics," seen here with a lady friend at a New York city nightclub. Circa 1941.

Also in 1939, a middle aged accountant, came to the conclusion that comic magazine publishing might be more fun and profitable than balancing books. His name was Victor Fox, and he learned of the Iger Studio through a mutual friend. Victor Fox approached Jerry Iger, expressed his desire to enter the comics field, and requested their assistance on the production end of the project. He stipulated the amount of money he was prepared to invest, and agreed to leave all the creative details to Jerry and Will. Fox's investment was sufficient to get a few titles off the ground.

Again, Jerry Iger thought long and considered all the details involved in the project and finally developed a kaleidoscope of marvelous comic book heroes. Some of the characters created for Victor Fox are of such



The cover of Blackthorne Publishing's reprint of the rare "National Comics" first issue. The cover art was completely reconstructed by Barbara Marker, who handled the inking and coloring and features the new laser scanned color separation process from Europe.

The power and force of Maurice Whitman's artistic style is reflected in this 1951 cover of "Jungle Comics."

The artistic mastery of John Celardo graces the cover of this 1949 issue of "Jumbo Comics."

nostalgic quality. Consider this cast of bigger than life protagonists: THE BLUE BEETLE, THE FLAME, THE GREEN MASK, SAMSON, and the original THOR. Those early Fox characters were excellent examples of the period in which they flourished. Many of them bore the unmistakable imprint of the artistic genius who rendered them, Lou Fine.

Perhaps of all the famous Fox comic heroes, the most charismatic one was the Blue Beetle. He was a dashing avenger of justice who relentlessly fought the denizens of the underworld. By day he was Dan Garrit, police officer of a large eastern city. But at night he donned his brilliant costume of blue chain maille and black mask and prowled the city street in search of law breakers.

The Blue Beetle, like all the early Fox comic heroes, thrived in a truly unique atmosphere. A strange aura of mystery seemed to surround all of them. This quality was masterfully captured in the title of one of the early Fox comic magazines; "MYSTERY MEN COMICS." The Flame and The Green Mask seemed to move in a world of pure enchantment.

Bob Kane had his hand in the production of those early Fox efforts, but with him it was not to be a lasting project. In the early months of 1939, Bob left the Iger Studios and went to work for the D.C. Publishing Company. The young cartoonist, although grateful to Jerry Iger, had recognized where his future lay. At D.C. Bob Kane created the legendary BATMAN comic strip, and marched into the pages of history.

The comic books produced for Fox Feature Syndicate (as Victor Fox called his publishing company) sold well and were kept in continous circulation. However, in less than two years of their initial publication, a problem arose.

Fox became lax in his payments to the Iger Studios. Months slipped by and his debts to

THE GREEN MASK

The Green Mask appeared on the third issue cover of Mystery Man Comics.

The Blue Beetle cover features pencils by Will Eisner and inks by the legendary Lou Fine.

Iger's company began to multiply. After four months had elapsed with no payment forthcoming, Iger refused to deliver any further work to the Fox office.

Jerry Iger instituted a law suit against Fox to collect the thousands of dollars due to the Iger Studios, for their work already delivered. While the law suit was pending, Jerry continued to supervise the ever increasing volume of work pouring in from Fiction House, Quality and Standard Publications.

When the case was finally brought to trial, a number of dramatic and amusing elements unfolded before the jury in a situation reminiscent of the numerous radio dramas of the day. Iger submitted as evidence bills, invoices, and written statements of obligation which were conclusive proof of Fox's indebtedness to the Iger Studios. Notwithstanding, the case might have taken a different turn, had it not been for the manner in which Victor Fox conducted himself when he was placed upon the witness stand to answer the charges brought against him. It was obvious to the jury that Victor Fox's testimony was completely untenable, and it was not long before the defendant himself realized that he made terrible blunders on the witness stand.

In the end Jerry's studio proved their charges and Fox was convicted. A court judgement was issued against Victor Fox, and he was ordered to pay his back debts and all court costs. But his was not the end of the Fox story. Nor was it the end of Jerry Iger's relationship to the publisher. Their paths would cross again.

In the fall of 1940, a young woman named Ruth Roche applied for a staff job at the Iger Studios. Ruth was an aspiring writer who wanted to try her hand at creating stories and scripts for comic books.

Jerry Iger with Ruth Roche at a New York Restaurant in 1942.

"Of course I'm willing to start at the bottom," she assured him. "Right now I'm only interested in getting the professional experience."

It is indeed strange how important events occur under the most fortuitous of circumstances. The case of Ruch Roche is an outstanding example of this. Despite her obvious lack of credentials Jerry hired her. This proved to be one of the wisest decisions he ever made.

Shortly thereafter in early 1941, the selective service system was enacted. Will Eisner was at the age where military induction was inevitable. In fact he was one of the earliest of the young men to receive a draft notice.

In April of 1941, Eisner told Iger that he had been drafted. This announcement came as quite a blow to Jerry. The two men toiled day and night to construct that viable operation which had proven to be of great value to both of them. Eisner's contribution would be missed.

A cash settlement was agreed upon and the legal papers were drawn up and signed. Jerry Iger was once again the sole owner and operator of the studio he established in the depths of the depression, the principle difference being that the operation was not much bigger. For Will Eisner it meant he would eventually achieve a legendary stature as the man who created and developed the comic hero beloved by fans around the world; The SPIRIT.

With the passing of time Jerry Iger grew to depend more and more upon the talents and professional know-how of Ruth Roche. For her part Ruth had realized her ambition of becoming a comic book scripter. In the fifteen years to follow, she would turn out reams of comic book story scripts that were converted into finished comic book stories. But more than that, Ruth

An example of Jerry Iger's early commercial art work.

became so proficient at business management, that Jerry eventually made her a full partner in the Iger Studios.

It was now the summer of 1941 and the comic book industry was booming. National Periodicals Publications (D.C.) led the pack with their two red hot properties, Superman and Batman. Jerry Siegle and Joe Shuster were basking in a wave of popularity usually enjoyed only by top novelists. Bob Kane was also riding the tail of the brilliant comet of success!

Meanwhile, in New York City's famed Empire State Building, a publisher named Martin Goodman was flooding the market with new comic book titles. His publishing company, Timely Comics (later to be called Marvel) had launched a number of super hero types that were selling well. Among them were such titans as The HUMAN TORCH, SUBMARINER, The BLACK AVENGER, RED RAVEN, and their stellar item, CAPTAIN AMERICA.

Jack Kirby, who left the Iger Studios the previous year, had joined the burgeoning Goodman staff. There he teamed up with an artist-writer named Joe Simon, and together they turned out a vast array of comic book material. One of the features assigned to them was the Captain America adventure strip. Through their unique story telling abilities and artistic talents, they carried "Old Cap" to the pinnacle of comics popularity. While this was going on, a young writer at Timely was just getting his feet wet in the seething waters of comic book production. His name was Stan Lee.

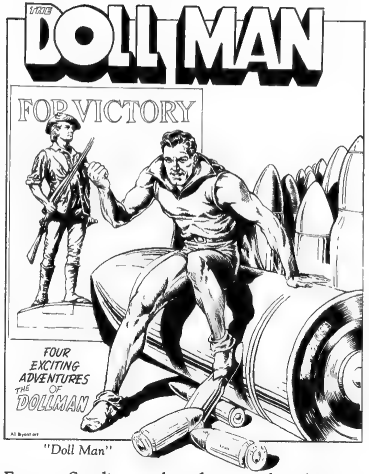
And at the Paramount Building in the heart of New York's Time Square, a publishing

company that had previously been involved in motion picture and radio broadcast magazines decided to get involved in comic books. This was Fawcett Publications. The management at Fawcett turned over an entire wing of office space to their newly formed comics department. Among the famous heroes they created were CAPTAIN MARVEL, BULLET MAN, SPY SMASHER, NYOKA, and CAPTAIN MARVEL Jr. Among the brilliant talents that emerged from the Fawcett group was C.C. Beck of Captain Marvel fame, and Mac RaBoy of Captain Marvel Jr., who later went on to illustrate the Sunday Flash Gordon page for King Features Syndicate.

There were numerous other publishers active in comics at this time. Collectively, they enriched the state of the art in comic production. We would like to recognize them all, but space limitations will only permit the listing of a few: Ace, Avon, Dell, Gilberton, Lev Gleason, Hilman, Holiyoke, Street & Smith, and Western Publishing Company.

At the Iger Studios, business was at a bustling pace. Iger hired two new artists who had exhibited considerable talent; Bob Webb and Jack Kamen. Webb was eventually assigned to the Sheena feature, where his exceptional talents enjoyed free rein. After serveral years of experience in working with and modifying the Jungle Queen, the talents of Bob Webb were indelibly stamped upon the visage of Sheena. Jack Kamen produced a large volume of comic material for Jerry Iger, but he was to arrive at the full heights of his achievement more than a decade later at the E.C. Publishing Company.

John CeLardo was doing a magnificent job on a number of features, but he struck his high water mark when he was assigned to draw the Kaanga comic strip for Jungle Comics. This experience was to eventually lead him to United



"Doll Man"

Features Syndicate, where for more than thirteen years he wrote and illustrated the Sunday Tarzan page that appeared in hundreds of American and European newspapers.

Meanwhile, other publishers were beating a path to the Iger Studios. Jerry accepted commissions from such outfits as Gilberton, Ajax Farrell, Avon, and a number of smaller companies. New artists were arriving on a frequent basis, and at times the demands of production were so great that the prolific Ruth Roche could not supply all the scripts needed. At that point, Jerry Iger was obliged to engage the services of free lance writers to fill the production gap.

It was the Fall of 1941. Within a few months the horror of Pearl Harbor would be felt, and America would be plunged into World War II.

Chapter Five

The Comics Get Into Uniform

December 7th, 1941, has been called "A day that will live in infamy." War had been thrust upon us. Americans rose to the challenge, and almost over night the nation was placed upon a war time footing.

Just as American heavy industry geared up for war, so did the American comic book industry. Numerous comic magazine publishers made the war the focal point of all their publishing efforts. Timely Comics was the best example of this. Captain America devoted all his skills and energies towards combatting the Nazi's and Japanese. The Human Torch and Submariner did the same (in the case of Submariner, it seems he fought the Axis powers not out of patriotic motives, but because the Germans and Japanese were constantly getting in his way.)

Fawcett Publishing Company went after the enemy with a passion. Both Captain Marvel and Captain Marvel Jr. hunted Nazi and Japanese spies in America and abroad. Bullet Man and Ibex did likewise. Lev Gleason did their bit and produced a comic book that has become a much sought after classic; "DARE DEVIL BATTLES HITLER."

At D.C., Simon and Kirby, who left Timely in 1942, created a number of comic heroes whose sole purpose was to wage war against America's enemies. The most outstanding example was the famous "BOY COMMANDOS," featuring Captain Rip Carter, U.S. Army. It should be noted that initially, D.C. hesitated to make the war the cornerstone of all their comic stories. This was not due to any lack of patriotism on the part of the D.C. editors. Rather, it was because they were reluctant to pursue the same path that all the other publishers were traveling. However, by 1944, D.C. joined the rest and concentrated their full publishing

This 1944 edition of "Bomber Comics' featured the war time hero, "Wonder Boy." (Gilberton Publishing Co.)

Jerry Iger and wife with host, boxing champion Jack Dempsey, at Dempsey's famous Broadway night club in 1940.

efforts on World War II.

Of course, at the Iger Studios, the war was the dominant subject of consideration. The Fiction House comics, FIGHT, WINGS, and RANGERS, were devoted exclusively to atomic themes. Ruth Roche was forced to take a crash program in military tactics and hardware, in order to fill the demands for accurate war stories. Even JUMBO and JUNGLE Comics converted to thematic concepts of war. In the remote jungles of Central Africa, both Sheena and Kaanga confronted the ubiquitous Axis Powers.

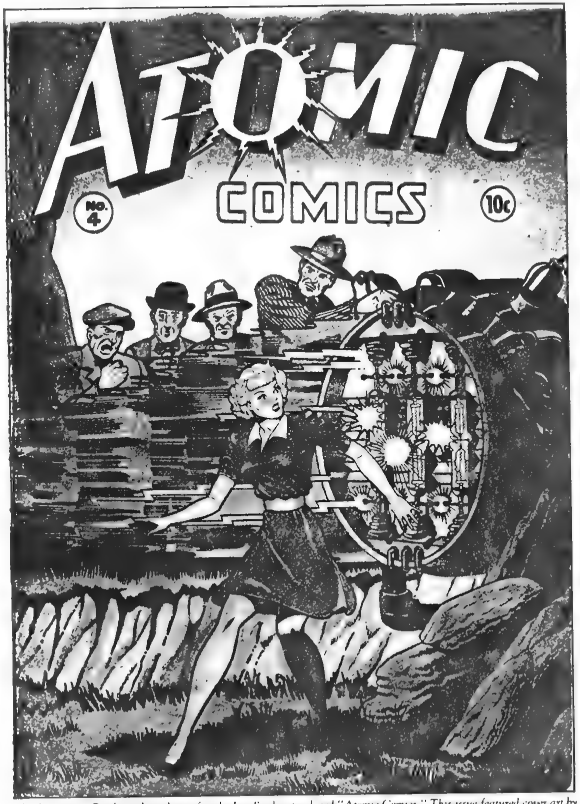
During those war years, comic book stories were being written by a rigid formula that was rarely if ever departed from. Certain criteria must of necessity be followed, and it would have been unthinkable for any comic book creator to defy those unwritten laws. For example, a hero could never display weakness in the presence of the enemy. He was not permitted to possess the emotions associated with fear, pain, or mental fatigue. He could not for a moment doubt the rightness or justice of his cause. He could not question the wisdom or folly of his orders. He simply obeyed them.

An enemy was never permitted to inflict a mortal injury to a comic book hero, or his side kick. That hero may have been vulnerable in a number ways, but it was ever incumbent upon the writer to leave a loop hole for the hero to back out of, or leap through to safety. Cynicism was never permitted to be a part of a comic hero's mental attitude. In fact, a cynical nature did not obtrude into the persona of comic heroes until the early 1970's, when some publishers decided to become more "realistic" in their material.

As the war progressed, it took a toll on the comic book industry. The artists and writers who were young enough for combat were inducted

This cover art pictured was completely re-inked by Paul Tallerday, and re-colored by Barbara Marker, for BLACKTHORNE'S *reprint classic first "Wings Comics." Exactingly reproduced using the new laser-scanned color separation process from Europe.*

War time themes filled this 1944 edition of "Bomber Comics," as with most comics in that era.



1945 brought the Atomic Bomb, and not long after the Iger Studios produced "Atomic Comics." This issue featured cover art by Jack Kamen

This 1946 cover shows a strong Alex Raymond influence. "Senorita Rio" was rendered by Lily Renee', one of the first women comic artists.

Jerry Iger and a lady friend at a New York nightclub. Circa 1945.

into the ranks of the armed services. Those who were too old for military service, or unfit for war, tried to take up the slack. Older artists were sought after. The fierce competition for jobs that formerly existed in the comics field was no longer a reality. Nearly anyone with a modicum of artistic talent was qualified as a comic artist. As a consequence, comic book standards tended to fall during this period.

But comic book sales were phenomenal despite the paper shortages that plagued the industry. With nearly twelve million men in uniform, who were hungry for entertainment, comic books sold to the armed services in fantastic numbers. At the Iger Studios, the art staff was so overburdened with deadlines, they were forced to work long hours of overtime to keep up with the demand. Jerry Iger suffered the loss of some of his finest artists to the military draft, but his responsibilities had increased rather than diminished.

Toward the end of 1944, comic book production had proliferated to the point where 500 individual titles were flowing from the various publishers. Most of these were monthly publications. When one considers that 64 pages of comic art comprised each of these magazines, something of the Herculean size of this industry can be appreciated. Not until 1952 would the comic book mass market approach the output it had known during World War II.

In August of 1945 Japan surrendered, putting an end to the most destructive war of all history. People the world over began to restructure their shattered lives and property. It was a time of new beginnings, for the world, and, of course, for the comics industry.

After the War

In the fall of 1945, millions of American men who had gone to war began returning to their homes. At the Iger Studios, Jerry and Ruth welcomed back artists who were gone for over three years. However, new conditions existed that were not easy to deal with. With the end of hostilities, and the subsequent reduction in the American Armed Forces, comic book sales dropped considerably. There were few military men to buy comic books, and as a result many publishers were forced to cut back on production. Numerous titles were dropped. In fact, only the most popular titles were retained.

However, the long term prospects were hopeful. The publishers assumed that if they held out long enough, a new generation of teenagers and young people would eventually take up the slack, and production could go forward once more. This did transpire, exactly as they had hoped.

With the return of peace, new thematic elements for comic stories had to be found. There were no more Nazi S.S. men or Japanese Kamikazes to kill, so the focal point for combatting evil was shifted in new directions. The superheroes at D.C. and Timely returned to fighting criminals, which were never in short supply. Fawcett's ever popular Captain Marvel turned to humor and began playing mostly for laughs. Standard Publishing Company started to dabble in science fiction, while American Comics Group went in for mysteries with a supernatural flavor.

Fiction House remained true to its original premise. Sheena and Kaanga returned to battling savage beasts and savage men in the jungles of Darkest Africa. The fliers in WINGS Comics reverted from military to civilian pilots. The soldiers from FIGHT and RANGERS Comics,

The premiere issue, released in 1946 by Universal Phoenix Studios. This Iger title was devoted to nautical themes,as was this Bob Webb cover.

simply became soldiers of fortune again. PLANET Comics still followed its science fiction fortunes, but a little less agressively. New heroes and heroines were waiting in the wings. The great shift to western comics was about to begin, and the phenomenal romance comics were three years in the future. Comic stories and comic types would come and go, but the medium would remain the same.

Meanwhile, the curious situation developing would have an impact of the comic book industry. In November of '45, Victor Fox decided that the time had come to reenter the comic book publishing field. With a return to peacetime conditions, he hoped to make a fresh start in the industry. But his initial efforts proved to be a flop. His common sense told him to go to a comics studio and arrange a package deal, but the expense of such a deal frightened him. Eventually, he had no choice. In the spring of 1946, he began to put out feelers to the industry, but the feedback was not encouraging.

The Chesler Shop looked upon him with suspicion. Harry Chesler had a long memory, and he recalled the litigation between Fox and the Iger Studios. Lloyd Jackquet, who had been running his own studio since 1939, cast a wary eye upon Victor Fox. He too was familiar with the unpleasant events of the past. This left only one alternative open to him . . . the Iger Studios.

It was a hard decision for Victor Fox was a proud man. But there was no choice. Through a third party, Victor arranged a private meeting with Jerry Iger. When the two men came together, the atmosphere was heavy between them. But finally, realizing what had to be done, Fox appologized for the bad relationships that had existed between them.

"Look, Jerry, I know you're bitter, and I

Matt Baker's lush brush and ink art captures the essence of the Seven Seas title.

CONGO KING

don't blame you," he said. "But if we can work together again, I promise I'll make it all up to you."

Iger thought for a moment, and with characteristic good will replied; "All right Victor, I'll take you on again, —but this time all will be handled through an iron clad contract."

So began a great renaissance in comic book history. Fox Features Syndicate, defunct for nearly four years suddenly sprange back into life. Jerry Iger created a whole new set of adventure heroes for Fox's line. The second generation characters became as famous as the first. Jo-Jo Congo King, Rulah Jungle Goddess and Phantom Lady. Victor Fox, while never repaying his earlier debts to the Iger Studios, always paid thereafter.

Again Ruth Roche was pounding out scripts for the Fox magazines, and the entire art staff at

A magnificent example of Matt Baker's pen and ink styling of "Flamingo."

the Iger Studios were assigned to draw them. Among the artists of that staff was a young man of extraordinary talent, who came to the Iger Studios early in 1946. As on so many other occasions, Jerry recognized the artistic skills this youth possessed, and hired him immediately. His name was Matt Baker.

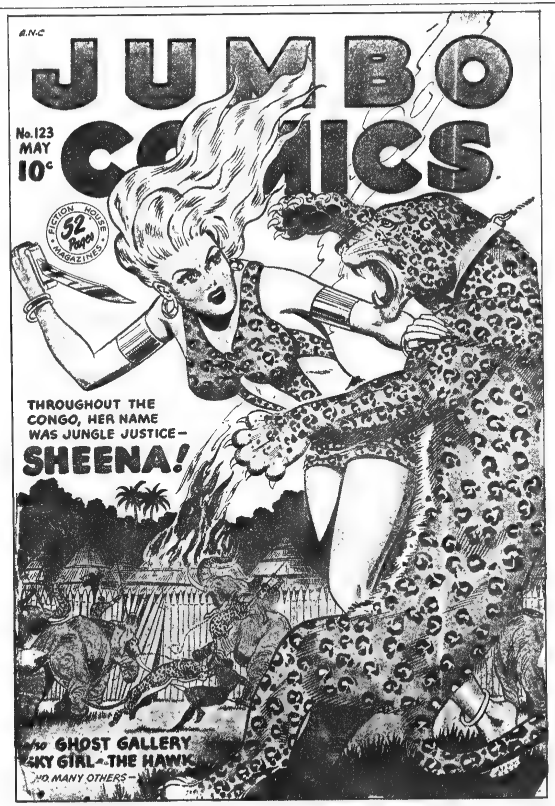
Today the work of Matt Baker is truly legendary and is sought after by collectors all over the world. His bold, but graceful figures in action situations created for him a reputation unequaled in the industry. Matt was assigned to the Phantom Lady feature. While working on this comic feature, his illustration skills rose to the heights of perfection. In truth, Matt did such a superb job on the Phantom Lady strip that he was contracted by Jerry Iger to draw the newspaper strip "FLAMINGO," which was distributed nationwide and also in many European newspapers.

The special Matt Baker mystique was present in all his commercial work, but especially in the lovely, graceful female figures. Matt is still considered the finest artist the genre has known. Had it not been for a congenital illness, he would have undoubtedly gone on to produce a large body of work. In 1955, at the age of 37, Matt Baker died. The industry grieved the loss of this incredibly talented young man.

In 1947, Mickey Spillane penned the famous "MIKE HAMMER" strip for Iger's Phoenix Syndicate. Once again Bob Webb was drawing Sheena, and John CeLardo was back on the Kaanga strip. Rubin Moreara, who drew Kaanga during the war, was at United Features Syndicate, illustrating the Sunday Tarzan page. Summer brought Burne Hogarth's return to the Tarzan strip.

A survey of adventure comics from the newspaper syndicates in 1947 makes for an interesting study. At King Features Syndicate,

A promotional piece for "Flamingo", by Matt Baker.



A classic Fiction House cover.

Mickey Spillane penned the "Mike Hammer" feature for the Iger Studios which was illustrated by the late Ed Robbins.

Alex Raymond was writing and illustrating his famous dective strip, RIP KIRBY. Raymond left Flash Gordon in 1944 to enter the Marine Corps, but decided not to return to the blond hero when the war ended. Austin Briggs was drawing Flash Gordon, and would continue to do so until replaced by Mac RaBoy a year later. Hal Foster was still turning out his marvelous Prince Valiant Sunday pages, and Brick Bradford and Mandrake the Magician were still adventuring in far away places.

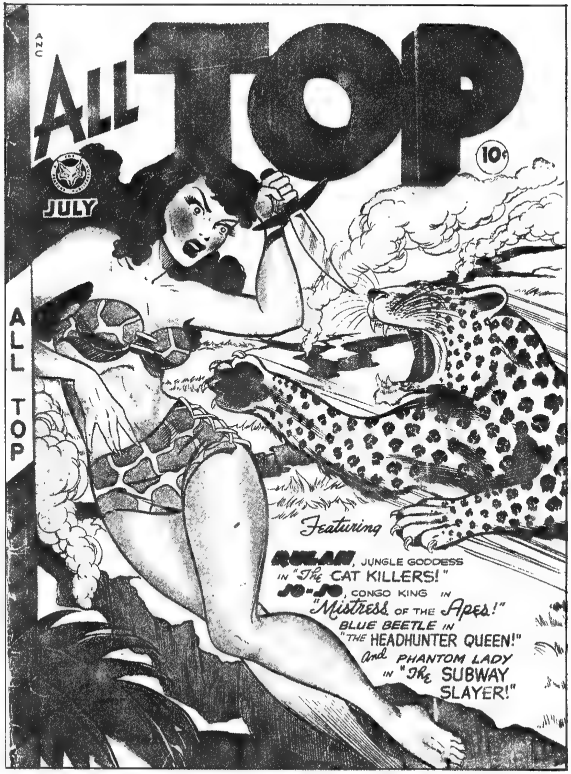
Field Enterprises launches a brand new adventure strip in 1947 called STEVE CANYON by Milton Caniff. For thirteen years the Caniff magic had been wrought upon the Terry and the Pirates feature, which had later been taken over by artist George Wunder. Dick Tracy was still involved in acts of daring-do, and in the early part of 1947, the New York News Syndicate launched the adventures of HOPALONG CASSIDY, based upon the western motion picture hero.

Burne Hogarth, fresh from his Drago experience at the Hall Syndicate, was bringing Tarzan to new heights of glory. Also at United Features, a new and very talented artist-writer named Warren Tufts was doing the outstanding western feature CASEY RUGGLES. Al Capp was still producing his marvelous Li'l Abner strip, and a new cartoonist named Ray Gotto was beguiling readers with his whimsical comic strip about a hillbilly baseball star called OZARK IKE.

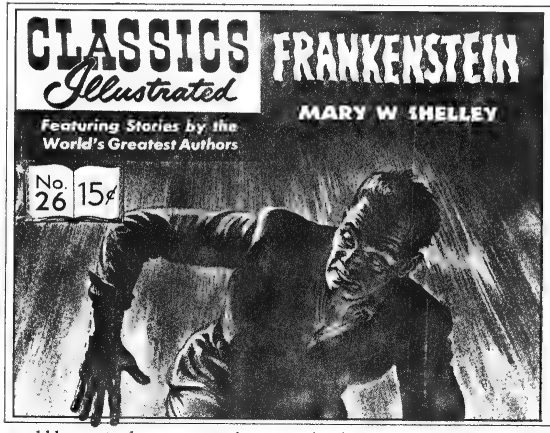
In 1947 we were introduced to a new full page Sunday adventure comic from King Features Syndicate. It was called "DICK'S ADVENTURES," written by Max Trell and drawn by the well known story illustrator, Neil O'Keif. This comic was drawn in the same format and general layout as the Prince Valiant page.

While many people have thought of comic books as the "stepchild" of newspaper comics, it

Jerry Iger (seated) with Bob Webb (standing), Mrs. Webb and son.



A Victor Fox publication, circa 1948. At this stage, the second generation of Fox characters were experiencing a decline at the Iger Studios.



Bob Webb's tour-de-force of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein."

A classic adaptation of the classic horror story.

A reprint issue is pictured.

would be a mistake to assume that comic books have never been an influence on syndicate strips. Quite the contrary is true. Many features that had their genesis in comic books went on to achieve syndication and newspaper appearances. But in addition, syndicated comics often lifted ideas that originally appeared in comic books. The format may be different but the medium is the same.

In 1948 Fiction House launched a new comic magazine called "INDIAN Comics." Jerry Iger created a new leading character for the book; a white woman with long red hair. Her hair was the primary characteric of the feature, and served as the strip's title: "FIRE HAIR." This leading lady captured the fancy of comic readers, for it was not long before the sales of Indian Comics began to rise sharply. The other Fiction House titles were also doing well, as were the publications for Fox, Ajax Farrell, and a new client, Gilberton Publishing Company.

In 1949, Gilberton, publisher of CLASS COMICS approached Jerry Iger with a request for a comic book adaptation of Mary Shelly's horror masterpiece, FRANKENSTEIN. They wanted a version that would be both "different" and "better" than what they had been receiving from free lance sources. Jerry turned the project over to Ruth who researched the story and wrote the script. The script was given to Bob Webb to draw. The finished product was a classic adaptation of a classic story. Gilberton was delighted with it, and comic book readers revelled in its marvelous reproduction.

In September of 1949, Jerry Iger had an opportunity to move his studios from their East 44th Street location, to a more centralized location further uptown. He rented a two story building on West 53rd Street and moved his staff and equipment into its more spacious facilities. It is fortunate that he did so, for this author.

Chapter Seven

The Legacy of the Golden Age

The Golden Age of comic books was drawing to a close although no one knew it at the time. In the early 1950's the comic production machinery at the Iger Studios continued unabated, disgorging vast amounts of material. The comic pages rolled off the "assembly line" in a virtual unending stream, and ever present deadlines were met.

In 1952 Jack Kamen left the Iger Studios and joined the elite group of artists at E.C. Publications. There, beside such giants as Frank Frazetta, Jack Davis, Al Williamson, and Wallace Wood, he began illustrating the fantasy science fiction, horror, crime and romance comics that made E.C. world famous.

Although Jack was missed, another young man of considerable talent enlisted in the Iger ranks which helped to fill the void. His name was Dick Giordano, who eventually became the only artist in comic book history to build a following exclusively as an inker. In 1980, after a long career in the comics, Giordano became comics editor at D.C.

By 1952 the comic book industry was beginning to show signs of ill health. In 1953, a blow was struck that sent shock waves throughout the entire comics field. National Periodicals Publications (D.C. Comics) launched a law suit against Fawcett Publications, alleging plagiarism in the matter of the Captain Marvel feature. D.C. claimed that Fawcett illegally appropriated the concept of Captain Marvel from the Superman legend.

On the face of it, such a charge was patently absurd. The only similarity between Superman and Captain Marvel was the fact that both characters possessed extraordinary physical prowess. The origins of the two men were entirely different, and their story plots were totally unrelated.

This action packed cover from 1952 was typical of the Fiction House combat genre. War themes dominated the pages of "Rangers."

Wendy Pini of "Elf Quest" fame, rendered this cartoon for Jerry Iger at a New York City convention.

There were other comic book heroes who were much closer to the Superman concept than Captain Marvel was. But those other heroes were not growing the fantastic sums of money that the good Captain was bringing in each month, therefore they posed no economic threat to D.C.

Louis Nizer, one of the most able lawyers in New York City, represented D.C. Nizer was an attorney with a proven track record in plagiarism cases, and he went after results like a bloodhound on the trail of a fox. After a long trial, D.C. emerged the victor. The owners of Superman were awarded damages against Fawcett. The settlement involved hundreds of thousands of dollars, and Fawcett was enjoined against further publication of Captain Marvel. This proved to be a cripling blow. It was so devastating in fact, that the entire line of Fawcett comic books was forced to cease publication. What had been a bustling enterprise, was now a silent, shadow of empty empty offices and corridors.

The entire comic books industry took note of this incident. Some trembled with anticipation of a similar fate. Many publishers took immediate steps to alter the appearances of their comic heroes to avoid a similar tragedy. Jerry Iger also noted the trial and its results, but since his comic heroes did not resemble Superman, or any of the properties of D.C., he had little to fear.

By the beginning of 1954, comic book sales began to slump. Many reasons have been put forth to explain why this happened. It has been suggested the principle reason for the decline was that many comic book readers turned to television for entertainment. But there were other factors involved that proved more ominous for comic book publishers than television.

In the spring of 1954 the United States Senate sub-committee on crime and its causes, investigated comic books as a possible link in the rising crime rate in America. Bill Gaines of E.C. Publications was singled out as a primary target of the investigation (possibly because his crime and horror comics were the most graphic of those being sold at the time).

As a result of this national exposure many parents of teenagers and pre-teens began looking at the comics their children were reading. In some cases they were horrified by what they saw and immediately forbade their youngsters to buy more comic books.

To make matters worse for the comics industry, in the fall of 1954, Dr. Fredric Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent* was published, and it exploded like a bombshell in the center of the comics world. It created a storm center of protest among civic and parental groups, who demanded an end to the "filthy

A very unusual comic for it's day, as it was devoted entirely to American Indians. The inspiration for "Indians" came from Jerry's childhood

The tall beauty, Irish McCalla portrayed "Sheena, Queen of the Jungle," in the popular television series of the late 50's.

Photo by Ron Prager

trash called comic books."

In his effort to impune the world of commercial comic books, Dr. Wertham resorted to numerous incidents of convoluted reasoning. While some of his arguments were valid, many of them were based on assumptions that were purely subjective.

All of the above elements collectively militated against the comic book publishing business. The pressures continued to mount and at the close of 1954 the sales of comic books dropped to an alarming level. By December many of the smaller publishers began to fold up. Then the larger publishers, still hoping conditions would improve, finally capitulated.

A handful of concerned businessmen, recognizing the desperate straits the industry was in, came to the conclusion that violence and sexual exploitation was responsible for most the woes of the industry.

To combat this problem, a document was prepared stating the objectives to be followed in "cleaning up" comics. A copy of this document was sent to all the publishers, many of which also saw it as the only way to survive, and quickly signed it. Thus was created the famous "Comics Code," the seal which has been affixed to millions of comic magazines since 1955.

Some subscribers of the comics code survived the "crash." Many publishers closed down during early 1955. *Mad Magazine* changed size so as not to be considered under the classification of a "comic book." Fiction House Comics also caved in during that spring and Jerry was forced to terminate his staff of many years.

Phoenix Syndicate continued on, despite the untimely death of Matt Baker. *Flamingo*, Iger's most popular strip came close to it's end, until a substitute artist was found. Few could emmulate the fluid, graceful style of Matt Baker.

Fiction House comics were now defunct, but it's characters were not forgotten. *Sheena* got her own t.v. series, thanks to Universal in 1957. Irish McCulla starred in the title role.

In the mid sixties, a phenomenon occured, interest in the old comics picked up. ABC's t.v. series *Batman* gave the industry a boost from 1965-66. It was a time of re-discovery of the medium that enchanted millions.

The renewed interest in old comics were reflected in sales of the new comics. For numerous publishers of the 40's and 50's, the movement was too late—the clock couldn't be turned back.

The late 60's brought a wave of "comic fandom" which swept the country. People from all walks of life became interested in comics.

A whole new industry started from the fandom; comic book shops and comic conventions. Comic Conventions brought together fans, artists, writers and publishers.

At the 1974 Comic Art Convention in New York city, the "Lifetime Achievement Award" was presented to Jerry Iger, for his contributions to the industry since it's inception.

The legendary Matt Baker, artist of "Flamingo."

The Man and His Epoch

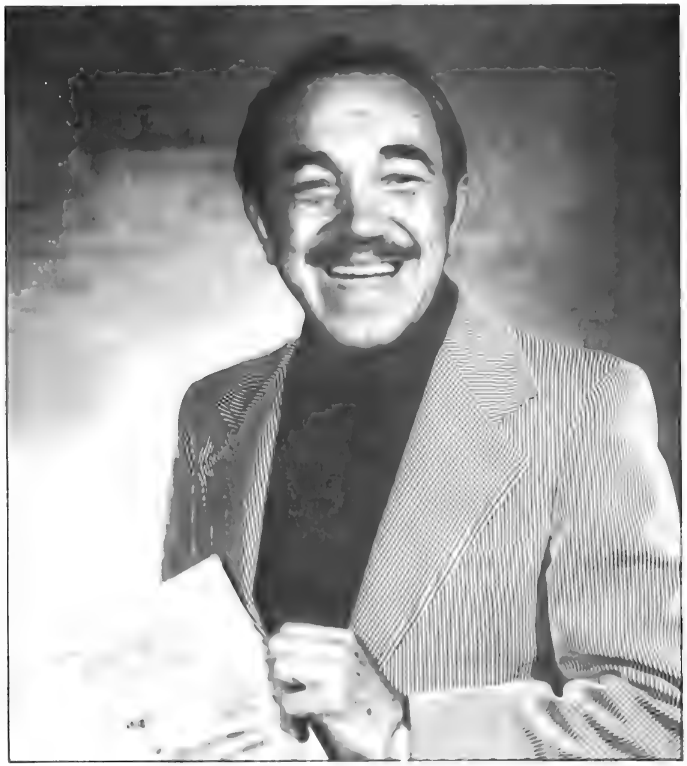
Jerry Iger has contributed more to the state of the art in comic production, than any other man. During his time as director of the Iger Studios, the sheer volume of material that was produced, almost staggers the mind. His contributions in terms of types and styles of material is boggling. Jerry Iger's competitors couldn't even come close to the volume produced from the Iger Shop.

It has been said that during those hectic days of comic book expansion (early 40's), Jerry Iger created new comic heroes, almost on a daily basis. While this may be an exaggeration, it's undoubtedly true that his imagination was constantly being taxed, to keep up with the demand for new material.

Back then, Jerry was a man of boundless energy, a stickler for details and in full command of the "tight ship" he ran. He tolerated no nonsense.

The Jerry Iger of the 1980's is a mild mannered, unassuming gentleman. Jerry has always had a soft spot in his heart for children and animals (noted for his kindness to both.) He was blessed with one child, his daughter Jayne—who is still the apple of his eye. His grandson, a robust young athlete has little inclination towards cartooning.

As a Manhattan resident from the 30's to the 50's, Jerry became familiar with celebraties of the entertainment world. As a member of the Cartoonists Society of America, he kept in contact with syndicate giants Alex Raymond, Hal Foster, Al Capp and Milton Caniff. A patron of the arts, Jerry was often in the company of stars of the Broadway scene. Actors, actresses, producers, newspaper columnists, band leaders, singers and dancers made up the roster of friends. In the 50's, Jerry became something of an entertainer. He appeared on a number of

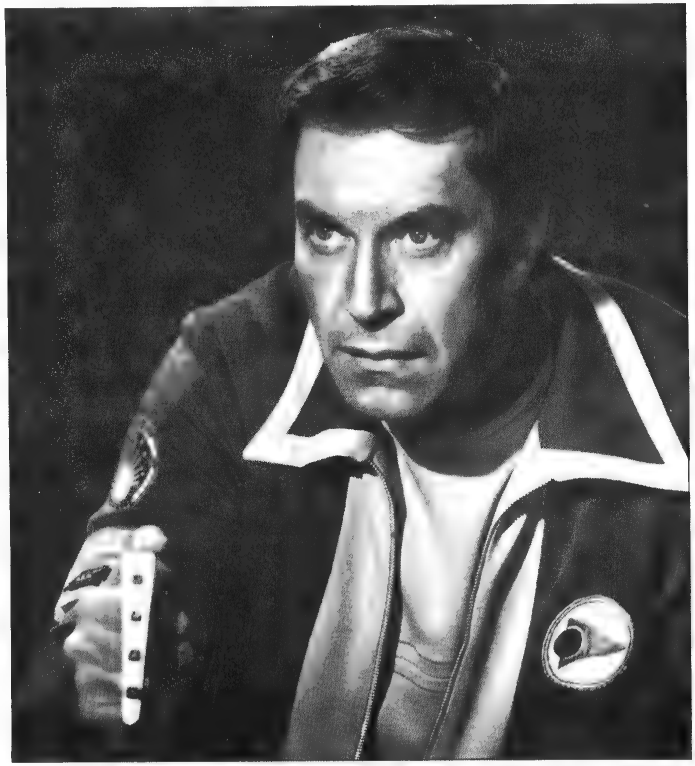


Jerry Iger as he appeared in the mid 1970's, holding one of his advertising brochures.

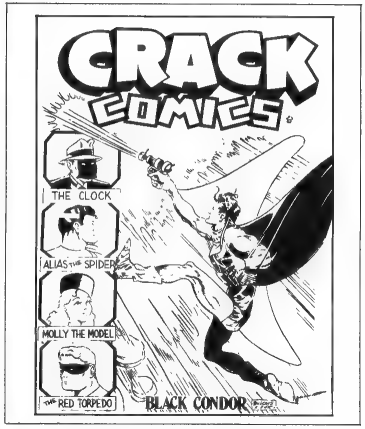
[illegible] whom Jerry Iger numbered among his friends

Television personality Bob Emery, hosted the "Small Fry Club," where Jerry Iger made numerous guest appearances demonstrating "quick draw" techniques.

Celebrated singer and trumpet player, Louie "Satchmo" Armstrong, a friend of Jerry's before Hollywood beckoned.



Noted film and television star ("Space 1999"), Martin Landau, got his start as a artist at the Iger Studios.



television programs and radio interviews. Plus being written up in various periodicals.

Jerry made a life long practice to obstain bigotry in all phases. He didn't care about the color, gender or religion of an artist or writer. But cared only about the talents, or lack of them.

If it were possible to take a poll of Americans above the age of fourty, to discover the number who seen Jerry's creations. The number would be amazing. To combine a love of vicarious adventure and sound business sense, isn't an easy accomplishment, yet Jerry merged the two in a practical manner.

One hallmark of Iger's Studio were the graceful female figures rendered. Matt Baker was undoubtably one of the finest "good girl" artists in the comics field. Alex Raymond was another to depict the feminine form similar to Baker's.

The comic books of the Golden age represented little more than a form of escapism for millions of readers. Many relaxed to the adventures of Sheena and others and some found more than a passing interest in comics. The collectors decided to preserve the newsprint treasures for heirlooms of the future. Such individuals formed the foundation of the Comics Fandom movement.

Through all of this, Jerry Iger's solitary figure stands out against this wonderful background of creation. The accomplishments of his long career will endure long after he's left this mortal sphere. The knowledge that he has contributed happy memories to millions of readers, means more to Jerry than his numerous awards and recognitions.

Today, he lives in Queens, New York surrounded by the memorabilia of a rich and rewarding career. This has been the story of Samuel Maxwell "Jerry" Iger, the founder and sustainer of *The Iger Comics Kingdom.*

Henry Major, whose work appears in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, did this characature of Jerry Iger. Circa 1925.

Epilogue

Comics are for the primary purpose of entertainment. Whether they achieve that goal is dependant on the ingrediants that go into them.

Jerry Iger would be the first to admit that the Golden Age never produced great literature. They were the simple stories of the conflict of good over evil, of course, the good guys always triumphed. The battle was usually very direct due to space limitations, at times resulting in situations of sheer incongruity. Comic fans were willing to accept all but the most blatant examples.

During the 1930's, the film industry suffered the same weakness, "B" grade films prevailed abundantly. Nat Levine (Mascot Pictures "serial king") once said; "We do not have the time for the luxury of re-takes. My crew has to get it right on the first shooting!" This attitude resulted in bloops and blunders on the silver screen.

The film industry suffered from time limitations. Comics were victimized by both time and space constrictions. Most comics ran 64 pages, and few stories ran in excess of 15 pages.* Lead stories usually ran 13-15 pages, with several short back up stories, hardly enough room for plot depth or character development.

Editorial staff of the *Comics Journal* magazine (comics news and critique) have consistantly lamented the failure of the industry to maximize the potential. Gary Groth, publisher, stated "We love the comics medium, but deplore the absurd pap that is currently being disgorged from comic publishers."

Has the comic industry ever produced anything to rival great literature? In my opinion, yes, Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant*, he set a standard that has never been surpassed. Few could rival his efforts. This industry has never attempted

anything remotely similar, not that it couldn't be done. There certainly is no lack of talent (artists or writers) with the industry. The mold has been set and few publishers have extended themselves beyond it. Experimentaton must be encouraged to pull comics out of the realm of mediocrity.

Recently, publishers out of the mainstream of comics productions, have begun to experiment with new concepts, sometimes very successfully. This is obvious cause for rejoicing, and a fond hope that it continues.

Looking back over four and a half decades of comics, one has to see the charm of the early efforts. The simplistic approach of the heroes to justice, fair play and good will just can't be written off due to lack of sophistication. They played a large part in the formation of childhood ideals in the 30's. During World War II they helped instill patriotism and pride in the young readers. Despite it's flaws, the comics industry has served a good cause in many ways.

At this juncture, I'd like to explain how the Iger Studios functioned, based on my personal observations. As mentioned earlier, Ruth Roche wrote scripts, which were translated into finished comic stories. Supplemental scripts were supplied by the respective publishers, and from free-lance writers.

Each script was a complete story; containing narration (the captions), and dialogue ("word balloons" containing the character's lines.) Instructions for the pencillers (scene setting, backgrounds, characters and panel layout,) were also included in the script. Note: The artists frequently ignored these instructions, only to render the story as they saw fit.

Scripts were given to pencillers (layout artists), who did the assignments on a free-lance basis in their home studios. The stories were pencilled 50% larger (than the printed page) on bristol board. The finished "pencils" were then returned to the Iger Studio for lettering of the copy. The pages were then passed out to the inkers, who carefully inked the penciller's drawing. From there it was on to an apprentice for the clean up process: erasing all pencil marks, opaquing extraneous blemishes and last but not least, restoring inked lines that were erased during the clean-up process. Finally, the pages were reviewed by Jerry Iger or Ruth Roche and returned to the publisher.

Sometimes more than one inker worked on the same page. When hectic schedules prevailed, as many as three or four worked on a single page. All inkers strived to maintain the same technique (at least they were told to), with one artist inking only characters faces. When the stories were completed, somehow the style of the penciller showed through on the finished product, and in all cases, every storie had the distinctive "Iger look" about it.

The Caplin-Iger Company, Limited

Blackthorne Publishing has asked me to pen a bit of background information of events over the last number of years.

S.M. Iger and I have formed a corporation, THE CAPLIN-IGER COMPANY, LTD., which owns and controls *all* the titles from the famous "Iger Shop." Historically, Jerry Iger never sold or tranferred the copyright or trademark in any of his characters or titles. It was his practice only to negotiate a license to a publisher such as Farrell or T.T. Scott, etc., to publish a story or series of stories based on a given list of characters. Upon expiration of the license, all rights and title to those characters and stories reverted to Mr. Iger by the terms of the contract.

The Iger shop was run in a manner similar to all great design studios. In other words, Jerry Iger hired a crack staff of artists to execute characters which he invented; out of the blue or at the behest of a publisher (e.g. See the historical notes by Jerry Iger.) The artists were employees, their work being executed under contract and belonging to the Iger Studios in perpetuity. Even in the case where Jerry Iger became partners with one of his artists (Will Eisner), upon dissolution of the partnership, all title to the characters created during the partnership remained with Jerry Iger, by contract.

Although stories were written by Jerry Iger (sometimes under the names of S.M. Regi or Jerry Maxwell, etc.) or in concert with his one-time partner, Ruth Roche, various artists were called upon to draw the characters. Sometimes several artists would contribute to a feature, since one artist's strong points, were another's weak points, this exception required a delicate balance of collaboration, coodinated by Jerry. Once in a while one artist would take over drawing a feature whose artwork was

"originated" by another, when the first artist was unavailable for whatever reason. But the Iger Studios always made an effort to avoid an assembly line approach in order to achieve an original look.

If a character seemed to go out of existance it was only because there was no "contract artist" available who could produce artwork that Jerry felt was up to snuff. When this happened, others companies sometimes used the opportunity either republish Iger shop stories, or to create additional stories using the pirated characters. No royalties were paid to the Iger Studios, and Jerry never thought much of pressing legal claims to sue for petty damages. In the early days, with the exception of Marvel and D.C., the proprietary interests of comic creators such as Jerry Iger weren't defended as assiduously as they are today. Pirated comic characters invariably disappeared when the marketplace became aware of the lack of quality, and sometimes they were even "sold" — not unlike the Brooklyn Bridge — to buyers who never received a valid title for their purchase! (It amuses me me to read, for example, how Blue Beetle looked a certain way during X years, then fell into a period of appearing poorly drawn, still later appeared back in it's old form. The implication is that Jerry Iger licensed or sold the character to a publisher who then had the right to use or sell it. This is far from the case, and examination of existing contracts shows no legal transfers or chain of title out of the Iger Studios.)

What seems like revival of characters in the mid-fifties was, as far as the Iger Shop was concerned, the re-introduction of characters which had found competent artists once again. Certainly Jerry Iger responded to the possibilities of utilizing outstanding artistic talent, as well as requests from publishers for specific material. One can speculate about he probably effects wars had on the types of characters appearing in comic books: During a time when we needed heroes, the comic creators poured forth with characters committed to saving America — Wonder Boy is high on the list. In the post war complacency of "grandfather Ike" the country's needs were different. Super heroes gave way to "Archie"— style stories, of just plain folks. The Comic Code also undoubtedly as a softening effect.

With best regards,
Lee Caplin
President
The Caplin-Iger Company, Ltd.

Historic Notes: Memories of Sheena

by Jerry Iger

So much has been said about "Sheena, Queen of the Jungle" that it's become almost impossible to separate fact from lore. Certainly Sheena ranks among the all-time great comic heroines, and will remain in high esteem as long as there are comic book afficionados and collectors.

Back in 1937, I had been producing a lot of material under mu own banner, "Univeral Phoenix Features." In my shop were some wonderful artists, many of whom worked free-lance on an "as needed" basis. Included were such names as Mort Meskin and Will Eisner. In addition to supplying comic strip material around the U.S., I had a business relationship with Editor's Press Service. EPS represented American syndicated services overseas, and ws interested in the features I was publishing. At that time, I was supplying strips for a magazine called "Wags." This was a black and white tabloid that enjoyed a large European circulation and was handled by EPS.

Eduardo Cardenas, who was in charge of the EPS publication (and who later became the Foreign Editor for *Reader's Digest*), called me in to plan some new features for *Wags*. He mentioned the popularity of "Tarzan," and ased me whether I could do a "knock-off" for his magazine. I replied that my shop was known for its original material, and that I didn't like the idea of doing a male jungle hero. "Why couldn't we have a jungle heroine?" I asked Eduardo. He replied, that it sounded OK to him, but what would I call it. Thinking back, it's strange to remember all the random ideas that used to go into creating new characters. For some reason, my mind wandered to early days in New York, when Jewish people were sometimes called "Sheenies" as an insult, and I piped up, "Why don't we call her 'Sheena'?" Eduardo didn't ask

how I thought that one up, and I didn't offer, but the name had a nice ring to it and it stuck. Once we had agreed that the new character's name would be "Sheena," Eduardo asked me to go back to my studio and bring him some sample drawings.

Arriving at the Universal Phoenix Features office, I looked through my roster of artists to see whom I'd pick to draw the prototype. I selected Mort Meskin for the first drawings. Mort ws one of the free-lance artists I relied upon. He mostly did illustrations, and this project offered him his first opportunity to sign his name to a published work. Another free-lancer at the time was Will Eisner. Will was working for me doing "Hawk of the Seas" and "ZX-5." He also did sports drawings that I syndicated with my other materials throughout the U.S. (a good collection of these drawings is in the book "Heroes of Sports" which I published with my partner, Lee Caplin, in 1984 as a trade book under the Pacific Comics label.) Some people have thought Will also had a role in the creation of "Sheena," but the closest Will got to Sheena was to do the art for a cover or two, long after the character had been published by *Wags*. The artists who are best remembered as drawing Sheena are Robert Webb and Bob Powell.

After *Wags* had been running the Sheena strips I approaced them to buy back the printer's plates, so I could publish them in the United States. Editor's Press service agreed, so after the sale had been consumated, I approached Thurman Scott at Fiction House. I convinced Thurman that we could reprint the tabloid-size plates as a giant comic book, just as we'd done at *Wags*. "But what can you do about getting us some color instead of those black and white drawings?" Thurman asked. I thought for a minute, and suggested using colored paper to get a color comic effect. Thurman loved the idea, and that's how *Jumbo* comics got started — the name reflecting thse first 8 issues cut to tabloid size. In fact, the last big Jumbo issue came out at the same time as the New York World's Fair, and was a commemerative issue. After that, when the original Wags plates were used up, we re-edited the material and brought Jumbo to conventional comic book size (still called Jumbo!). Sheena still was just one of the strips.

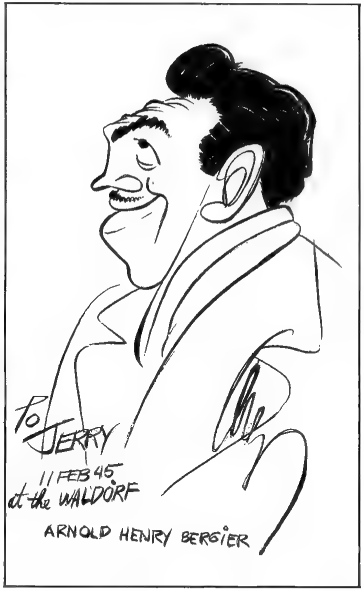
Around 1940, Sheena first appeared as a lead feature, and in the meanwhile, Universal Phoenix Features had gone into a "holding pattern" because I had gone into a brief partnership with Will Eisner in mid-1938, only to buy him out in 1940, when Will was drafted into the Army to do military posters. (Will had become so accomplished — and so expensive! — as a freelance artist, that the only way I could afford his services was to make him a partner.) After "Iger & Eisner, Ltd." was disolved, I returned to publishing as "Phoenix Features". A few years later, Fiction House requested that I produced a Sheena quarterly, and for the next 10 years or so, "Sheena" had her own comic.

In 1953, there was a big to do about 3-D comics. Thurman Scott called me to ask whether I could produce a 3-D "Sheena" to get in on the excitement. I said I could, even though I didn't have the slightest idea how! The first thing I did was to call a close friend, Frank Little, for advice. Frank was a highly talented animator for Paul Terry ("Terry Tunes" and "Mighty Mouse"), and he assured me he would pitch in and help. So with Bob Webb to do the drawing, Frank Little to do the color seperations and yours truly doing the stories, we felt we had a dynamic team.

Thurman Scott was keeping his fingers crossed, hoping Sheena 3-D would be the smash hit we were hoping for to pull Fiction House out of it's financial slump.

The Sheena "team" got all the material together. Frank traveled to Waterbury, Connecticut to Eastern Color Printing to do the

Sheena was introduced to a whole new generation of readers following BLACKTHORNE PUBLISHING'S *release of "Sheena, Queen of the Jungle 3-D" The beautiful cover shown here is by Dave Stevens, of "Rocketeer" fame. This publication featured revamped art and new three dimensional separations, by Ray Zone.*



separations. Great care ws taken with the inking and printing, and the Sheena 3-D was a masterpiece. The only disapointment was that Sheena alone couldn't reverse the fortunes of Fiction House, and the company soon went out of business.

If memory serves me correctly, the Sheena 3-D was Sheena's last comic book appearance until May 1985, when Blackthorne Publishing, Incorporated re-released Sheena 3-D, with re-touched art and all new 3-D separations!

Our new venture, "The Caplin-Iger Company, Ltd.," is dedicated to presenting features from the "Iger Shop" in a historical context. It is my hope that relating my personal experiences in connection with the evolution of "Sheena, Queen of the Jungle," as well as other features, will increase the understanding and enjoyment of these golden-age creations for future generations of comic book collectors.

Jerry Iger, 1985

April 1947 issue of "Fight Comics," features a cover by Joe Doolin.

Fiction House Index

Special thanks to Al Dellinges and Ray Funk for their assistance in compiling the index.

Fight Comics Covers Index

ISSUE # / DATE	ARTIST
1 January 1940	Proto Celardo
2	Eisner
3	?
4	?
5	Powell
6	Powell
7	Powell
8	Sultan
9	Viscarte Celardo
10	Zolne
11 February 1941	Zolne
12	Zolne
13	Zolne
14	Zolne
15	Zolne
16	Zolne
17 February 1942	Zolne
18	Zolne
19	Zolne
20	Zolne
21	Zolne
22	Zolne
23 January 1943	Zolne
24	Zolne
25	Zolne
26	Zolne
27	Zolne
28	Rubimore
29	Rubimore
30 February 1944	Doolin
31	Doolin
32	Doolin
33	Doolin
34	Doolin
35	Zolne
36 February 1945	Doolin
37	Doolin
38	Doolin
39	Doolin
40	Doolin
41	Doolin
42 February 1946	Doolin
43	Doolin
44	Doolin
45	Doolin
46	Doolin
47	Rens
48 February 1947	Doolin
49	Doolin
50	Doolin
51	Doolin
52	Doolin
53	Doolin
54 February 1948	Doolin
55	Doolin
56	Doolin
57	Doolin
58	Doolin
59	Doolin
60 February 1949	Doolin
61	Doolin
62	Doolin
63	Shaw
64	Shaw
65	Shaw
66 January 1950	Shaw
67	Shaw
68	Shaw
69	Shaw
70	Shaw
71	Shaw
72 January 1951	Shaw
73	Whitman
74	Whitman
75	Whitman
76	Whitman
77	Whitman
78	Whitman
79	Whitman
80	Whitman
81	Whitman
82	Whitman
83	Whitman
84	Whitman
85	Whitman
86 Summer 1954	Unknown

The artistic mastery of Joe Doolin graces the cover of this 1945 issue of "Jumbo Comics."

Jumbo Comics Covers Index

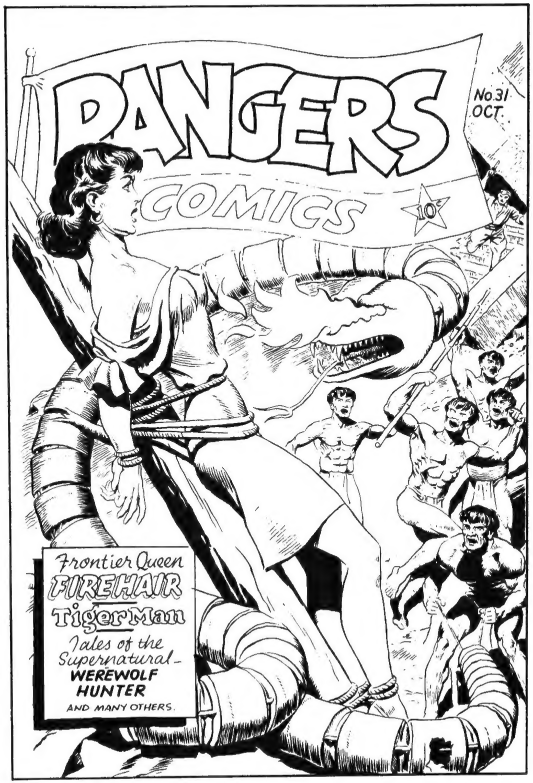
ISSUE # / DATE	ARTIST
1 September 1938	Eisner
2	?
3	?
4	?
5	Eisner
6	Eisner
7	Papp
8	?
9	Eisner
10	Fine
11	Celardo ?
12 January 1940	Eisner
13 February 1940	Eisner
14 March 1940	Powell
14 March 1940	Sultan
15 April 1940	Powell
16 May 1940	Powell
17 June 1940	Powell
18 July 1940	Sultan
19 August 1940	Powell
20 September 1940	Celardo
21 October 1940	Zolne
22 November 1940	Zolne
23 December 1940	Zolne
24 January 1941	Zolne
25 February 1941	Viscardi
26 March 1941	Viscardi
27 April 1941	Celardo
28 May 1941	Zolne
29 June 1941	Zolne
30 July 1941	Zolne
31 August 1941	Zolne
31 September 1941	Zolne
32 October 1941	Zolne
33 November 1941	Zolne
34 December 1941	Zolne
35 January 1942	Zolne
36 February 1942	Zolne
37 March 1942	Zolne
38 April 1942	Zolne
39 May 1942	Zolne
40 June 1942	Zolne
41 July 1942	Zolne
42 August 1942	Zolne
43 September 1942	Zolne
44 October 1942	Zolne
45 November 1942	Zolne
46 December 1942	Zolne
47 January 1943	Zolne
48 February 1943	Zolne
49 March 1943	Zolne
50 April 1943	Zolne
51 May 1943	Zolne
52 June 1943	Viscardi
53 July 1943	Viscardi
54 August 1943	J. Martin
55 September 1943	Saff
56 October 1943	Saff
57 November 1943	Saff
58 December 1943	Saff
59 January 1944	Saff
60 February 1944	Saff
61 March 1944	Saff
62 April 1944	Saff
63 May 1944	Saff
64 June 1944	Saff
65 July 1944	Saff
66 August 1944	Doolin
67 September 1944	Doolin
68 October 1944	Doolin
69 November 1944	Doolin
70 December 1944	Doolin
71 January 1945	Doolin
72 February 1945	Doolin
73 March 1945	Doolin
74 April 1945	Doolin
75 May 1945	Doolin
76 June 1945	Doolin
77 July 1945	Doolin
78 August 1945	Doolin
79 September 1945	Doolin
80 October 1945	Doolin
81 November 1945	Doolin
82 December 1945	Doolin
83 January 1946	Doolin
84 February 1946	Doolin
85 March 1946	Doolin
86 April 1946	Doolin
87 May 1946	Doolin
88 June 1946	Doolin
89 July 1946	Doolin
90 August 1946	Doolin
91 September 1946	Doolin
92 October 1946	Doolin
93 November 1946	Doolin
94 December 1946	Doolin
95 January 1947	Larsen
96 February 1947	Doolin
97 March 1947	Doolin
98 April 1947	Doolin
99 May 1947	Doolin
100 June 1947	Doolin
101 July 1947	Doolin
102 August 1947	Doolin
103 September 1947	Doolin
104 October 1947	Doolin
105 November 1947	Doolin
106 December 1947	Doolin
107 January 1948	Doolin
108 February 1948	Doolin
109 March 1948	Doolin
110 April 1948	Doolin
111 May 1948	Doolin
112 June 1948	Doolin
113 July 1948	Doolin
114 August 1948	Shaw
115 September 1948	Doolin
116 October 1948	Doolin
117 November 1948	Doolin
118 December 1948	Doolin
119 January 1949	Zolne?
120 February 1949	?
121 March 1949	Shaw
122 April 1949	Doolin
123 May 1949	Doolin
124 June 1949	Shaw
125 July 1949	Doolin
126 August 1949	Shaw
127 September 1949	Doolin
128 October 1949	Shaw
129 November 1949	Shaw
130 December 1949	Shaw
131 January 1950	Shaw
132 February 1950	Shaw
132 March 1950	Shaw
133 April 1950	Shaw
134 May 1950	Shaw
135 June 1950	Shaw
136 July 1950	Shaw
137 August 1950	Shaw
138 September 1950	Shaw
139 October 1950	Shaw
140 November 1950	Shaw
140 October 1950	Shaw
141 November 1950	Shaw
142 December 1950	Shaw
143 January 1951	Shaw
144 February 1951	Shaw
145 March 1951	Shaw
146 April 1951	Whitman
147 May 1951	Whitman
148 June 1951	Whitman
149 July 1951	Whitman
150 August 1951	Whitman
151 September 1951	Whitman
152 October 1951	Whitman
153 November 1951	Whitman
154 December 1951	Whitman
156 February 1951	Whitman
157	Whitman
158	Whitman
159	Whitman
160	Whitman
161	Whitman
162	Whitman
163	Whitman
164	Whitman
165	Whitman
166	Whitman
167 April 1953	Whitman

November 1947 cover of "Jungle Comics" with art by Joe Doolin.

Jungle Comics Covers Index

ISSUE # / DATE	ARTIST
1 January 1940	Proto-Celardo
2 February 1940	Eisner-Powell
3 March 1940	Sultan
4 April 1940	Sultan
5 May 1940	Powell
6 June 1940	Powell
7 July 1940	Powell
8 August 1940	Powell
9 September 1940	Powell
10 October 1940	Viscardi
11 November 1940	Viscardi
12 December 1940	Zolne
13 January 1941	Zolne
14 February 1941	Tuska
15 March 1941	Appel
16 April 1941	Viscardi
17 May 1941	Viscardi
18 June 1941	Celardo
19 July 1941	Zolne
20 August 1941	Zolne
21 September 1941	Zolne
22 October 1941	Zolne
23 November 1941	Zolne
24 December 1941	Zolne
25 January 1942	Zolne
26 February 1942	Zolne
27 March 1942	Zolne
28 April 1942	Zolne
29 May 1942	Zolne
30 June 1942	Zolne
31 July 1942	Zolne
32 August 1942	Zolne
33 September 1942	Zolne
34 October 1942	Zolne
35 November 1942	Zolne
36 December 1942	Zolne
37 January 1943	Zolne
38 February 1943	Zolne
39 March 1943	Zolne
40 April 1943	Zolne
41 May 1943	Zolne
42 June 1943	Reprint of # 18
43 July 1943	Rubinstein
44 August 1943	Robinson
45 September 1943	John Martin
46 October 1943	John Martin
47 November 1943	John Martin
48 December 1943	Neal
49 January 1944	Doolin
50 February 194	Doolin
50 February 1944	Doolin
51 March 1944	Doolin
52 April 1944	Doolin
53 May 1944	Doolin
54 June 1944	Doolin
55 July 1944	Doolin
56 August 1944	Doolin
57 September 1944	Doolin
58 October 1944	Doolin
59 November 1944	Doolin
60 December 1944	Doolin
61 January 1945	Doolin
62 February 1945	Doolin
63 March 1945	Doolin
64 April 1945	Doolin
65 May 1945	Doolin
66 June 1945	Doolin
67 July 1945	Doolin
68 August 1945	Doolin
69 September 1945	Doolin
70 October 1945	Doolin
71 November 1945	Doolin
72 December 1945	Doolin
73 January 1946	Doolin
74 February 1946	Doolin
75 March 1946	Doolin
76 April 1946	Doolin
77 May 1946	Doolin
78 June 1946	Doolin
79 July 1946	Doolin
80 August 1946	Doolin
81 September 1946	Doolin
82 October 1946	Doolin
83 December 1946	Doolin
84 January 1947	Larsen
85 February 1947	Doolin
86 March 1947	Doolin
87 April 1947	Doolin
88 May 1947	Reprints #44
89 June 1947	Doolin
90 July 1947	Doolin
91 August 1947	Doolin
92 September 1947	Doolin
93 October 1947	Doolin
94 November 1947	Doolin
95 December 1947	Doolin
96 January 1948	Doolin
97 January 1948	Doolin
98 February 1948	Celardo
99 March 1948	Celardo
100 April 1948	Celardo
101 May 1948	Celardo
102 June 1948	Celardo
103 July 1948	Celardo
104 August 1948	Celardo
105 September 1948	Celardo
106 October 1948	Celardo
107 November 1948	Celardo
108 December 1948	Celardo
109 January 1949	Celardo
110 February 1949	Celardo
111 March 1949	Celardo
112 April 1949	Celardo
113 May 1949	Celardo
114 June 1949	Celardo
115 July 1949	Webby
116 August 1949	Webby
117 September 1949	Webby
118 October 1949	Webby
119 November 1949	Webby
120 December 1949	Webby
121 January, 1950	Webby
122 February 1950	Webby *
123 March 1950	Webby
124 April 1950	Webby
125 May 1950	Webby *
126 June 1950	Webby
127 July 1950	Webby
128 August 1950	Webby *
129 September 1950	Webby
130 October 1950	Webby *
131 November 1950	Webby *
132 December 1950	Webby *
133 January 1951	Whitman
134 February 1951	Whitman
135 March 1951	Webb
136 April 1951	Webb
137 May 1951	Whitman
138 June 1951	Whitman
139 July 1951	Whitman
140 August 1951	Whitman
141 September 1951	Whitman
142 October 1951	Whitman
143 November 1951	Whitman
144 December 1951	Whitman
145 January 1952	Whitman
146 February 1952	Whitman
147 March 1952	Whitman
148 April 1952	Whitman
149 May 1952	Whitman
150 June 1952	Whitman
151 July 1952	Whitman
152 August 1952	Whitman
153 September 1952	Whitman
154 October 1952	Whitman
155 November 1952	Whitman
156 December 1952	Whitman
157 "	Whitman
158 "	Whitman
159 "	Whitman
160 "	Whitman
162 "	Whitman
163 "	Whitman

Webby * = Feldstein ish



February 1946 "Rangers" cover, featuring a Fire Hair cover by Joe Doolin.

Rangers Comics Covers Index

ISSUE # / DATE	ARTIST	ISSUE # / DATE	ARTIST
1 October 1941	Zolne	36	Doolin
2	Zolne	37	Doolin
3	Zolne	38	Doolin
4 April 1942	Zolne	39 February 1948	Doolin
5	Zolne	40	Lubbers
6	Zolne	41	Lubbers
7	Zolne	42	Lubbers
8	Zolne	43	Lubbers
9 February 1943	Zolne	44	Lubbers
10	Zolne	45 February 1949	Lubbers
11	Zolne	46	Lubbers
12	Zolne	47	Lubbers
13	Zolne	48	Lubbers
14	Zolne	49	Lubbers
15 February 1944	Zolne	50	Shaw
16	Zolne	51 February 1950	Shaw
17	Zolne	52	Shaw
18	Doolin	53	Shaw
19	Doolin	54	Shaw
20	Doolin	55	Webby
21 February 1945	Doolin	56	Webby
22	Doolin	57 February 1951	Webby
23	Doolin	58	Webby
24	Doolin	59	Webby
25	Doolin	60	Webby
26	Doolin	61	Whitman
27 February 1946	Doolin	62	Whitman
28	Doolin	63 February 1952	Whitman
29	Doolin	64	Whitman
30	Doolin	65	Whitman
31	Doolin	66	Whitman
32	Doolin	67	Whitman
33 February 1947	Doolin	68	Whitman
34	Doolin	69 Winter 1952	Whitman
35	Doolin		

April 1949 "Wings" cover with art by Bob Lubbers.

WINGS COMICS COVERS INDEX

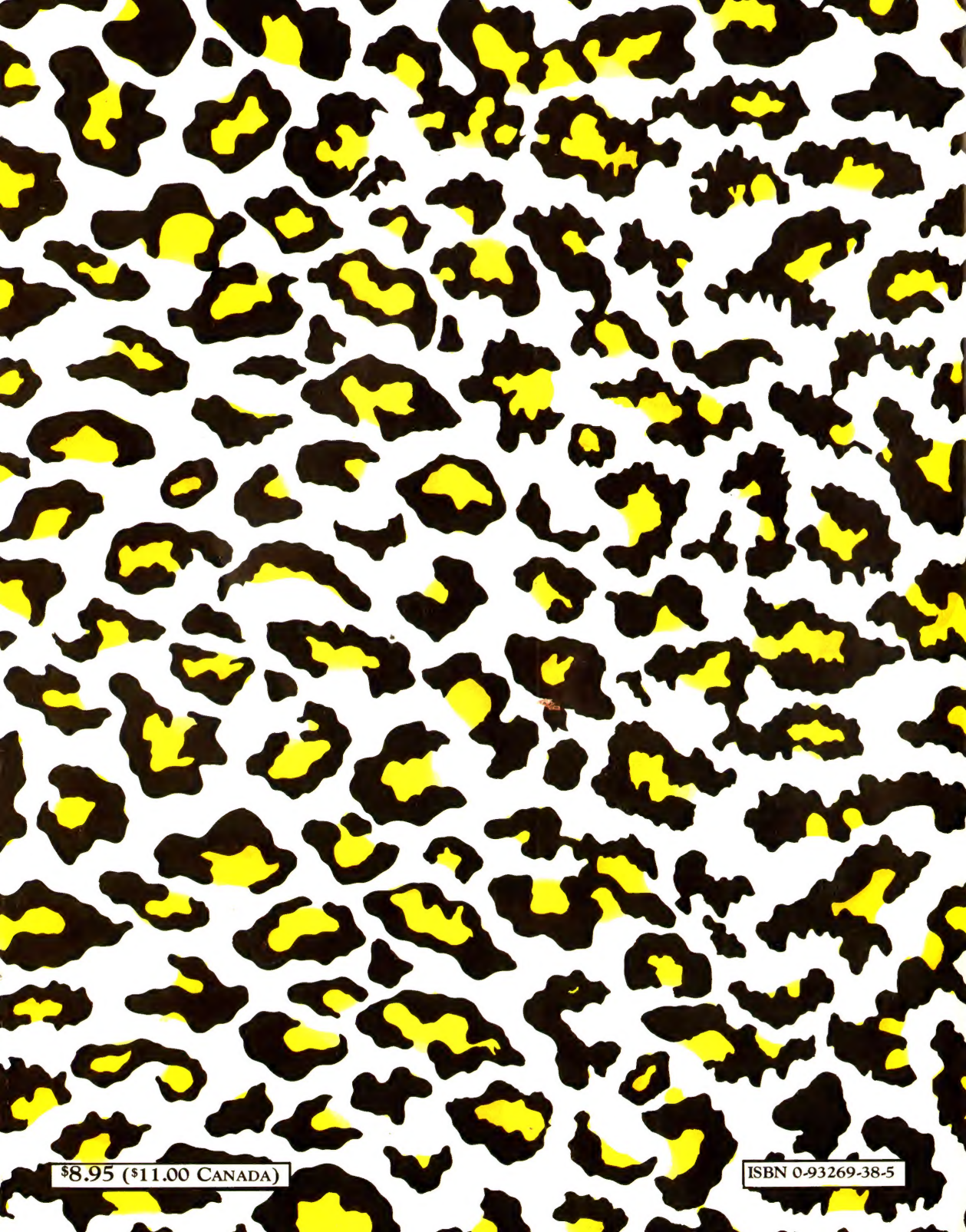
ISSUE # / DATE	ARTIST
1 September 1940	Fawcette?
2 October 1940	Fawcette
3 November 1940	Fawcette
4 December 1940	Fawcette
5 January 1941	Fawcette
6 February 1941	Fawcette
7 March 1941	Fawcette
8 April 1941	Fawcette
9 May 1941	Fawcette
10 June 1941	Fawcette
11 July 1941	Fawcette
12 August 1941	Fawcette
13 September 1941	Fawcette
14 October 1941	Fawcette
15 November 1941	Zolnc
16 December 1941	Fawcette
17 January 1942	Fawcette
18 February 1942	Fawcette
19 March 1942	Fawcette
20 April 1942	Fawcette
21 May 1942	Fawcette
22 June 1942	Fawcette
23 July 1942	Fawcette
24 August 1942	Fawcette
25 September 1942	Fawcette
26 October 1942	Fawcette
27 November 1942	Fawcette
28 December 1942	Fawcette
29 January 1943	Fawcette
30 February 1943	Fawcette
31 March 1943	Fawcette
32 April 1943	Fawcette
33 May 1943	Fawcette
34 June 1943	Saaf
35 July 1943	Saaf
36 August 1943	Saaf
37 September 1943	Saaf
38 October 1943	Saaf
39 November 1943	Saaf
40 December 1943	Saaf
41 January 1944	Saaf
42 February 1944	Saaf
43 March 1944	Saaf
44 April 1944	Saaf
45 May 1944	Saaf
46 June 1944	Saaf
47 July 1944	Saaf
48 August 1944	Saaf
49 September 1944	Doolin
50 October 1944	Saaf
51 November 1944	Saaf
52 December 1944	Saaf
53 January 1945	Saaf
54 February 1945	Saaf
55 March 1945	Saaf
56 April 1945	Saaf
57 May 1945	Saaf
58 June 1945	Elias
59 July 1945	Elias
60 August 1945	Elias
61 September 1945	Elias
62 October 1945	Elias
63 November 1945	Elias
64 December 1945	Elias
65 January 1946	Elias
66 February 1946	Elias
67 March 1946	Elias
68 April 1946	Elias
69 May 1946	Elias
70 June 1946	Elias
71 July 1946	Elias
72 August 1946	Elias
73 September 1946	Doolin
74 October 1946	Lubbers
75 November 1946	Lubbers
76 December 1946	Lubbers
77 January 1947	Lubbers
78 February 1947	Lubbers
79 March 1947	Lubbers
80 April 1947	Lubbers
81 May 1947	Lubbers
82 June 1947	Lubbers
83 July 1947	Lubbers
84 August 1947	Lubbers
85 September 1947	Lubbers
86 October 1947	Lubbers
87 November 1947	Lubbers
88 December 1947	Lubbers
89 January 1948	Lubbers
90 February 1948	Lubbers
91 March 1948	Lubbers
92 April 1948	Lubbers
93 May 1948	Lubbers
94 June 1948	Lubbers
95 July 1948	Lubbers
96 August 1948	Lubbers
97 September 1948	Lubbers
98 October 1948	Lubbers
99 November 1948	Lubbers
100 December 1948	Lubbers
101 January 1949	Lubbers
102 February 1949	Lubbers
103 March 1949	Lubbers
104	Lubbers
105	Lubbers
106	Lubbers
107	Lubbers
108	Lubbers
109	Lubbers
110	Doolin
111 Spring 1950	Doolin
112	Lubbers
113	Whitman
114 Summer 1951	Whitman
115	?
116 Spring 1952	Whitman?
117	Whitman
118	Whitman
119 Spring 1953	Whitman
120	Whitman
121	Whitman
122	Whitman
123	Whitman
124 Summer 1954	Whitman

About the Author

Jay Edward Disbrow

Jay Edward Disbrow, a former employee of the late, great Iger Studios during the "Golden Age of Comics," gives us this tribute to Jerry Iger. The days of a booming comic industry are fondly recalled, along with the men and women who created the legendary characters of an era past.

The author is married, has two children and now resides in New Jersey. Now retired, Jay Disbrow writes and illustrates feature articles for various publications as a hobby.



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